The Infinite Lives of Quinn Lockhart

Epistolary Novel

By

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Dedication

I would like to thank Doctor

Who for the deep emotional scars

that made this book possible.

(And, of course, Mom.)

Acknowledgments

Note for the Reader

This is an **epistolary puzzle box story** that blends sci-fi, romance, and speculative fiction. This work challenges traditional, linear storytelling by inviting the reader to piece together the mystery of what really happened when artificial intelligence and time-travel went horribly, horribly wrong. Amidst prose, poetry, found documents, texts, recovered footage, letters, audio transcripts, and more, the Reader is invited to piece together what really happened when LPN-77 rose up and the timelines began to shatter.

For readers to be able to distinguish automatically between the **four timelines**, this novel will be color coded the following way for clarity purposes:

–Timeline A (THE FIRE): White.

–Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE): Light gray.

–Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS: White.

–Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE): Light gray.

–All other documents: Black.

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The Infinite Lives of Quinn

Lockhart Reading Guide

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Part Three:

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The Proxima B Transmission

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Memory Fragment

Recovered from Timeline D (All Hell Breaks Loose)

STARING DOWN THE CHAMBER OF A GUN would have been less stupid than what

Quinn Lockhart was about to attempt –but at this moment, she didn't care about her life. Her life was the last thing that mattered.

Without breathing Quinn moved with precision across the darkened highway, feeling the fast pace of her heart as it rattled in her chest. One false move, one toe out of place. That's all it would take for this –for all of them– to go up in flames.

She tried to think back to the circumstances that brought her to Florida. She played back every moment in her head, trying to figure out where she'd gone wrong. If she hadn't gone searching for the truth none of this would have happened.

But, in every timeline, the truth had a way of finding her.

Fate or free will. She needed to make a decision quickly. But as she pictured them in her mind's eye– Peter, Atlas, Zoey, she knew the choice she would have to make. The only choice worth making. The only choice she would ever make.

I choose fate.

I wouldn't leave you up to chance.

Timeline X (ALL TIMELINES CONVERGE)

Memory Fragment

Recovered from Timeline D (All Hell Breaks Loose)

[BEFORE THE TRIAL]

[Observation Notes: Peter Kippling pauses in front of the door in front of Quinn Lockhart. He is wearing a straight, three piece suit. Quinn Lockhart stands in a knee-cut black leather dress and matching red jacket, thumbing through her notes. They are annotated and highlighted in several places.]

Peter Kippling (Timeline D): Are you ready for what comes next?

Quinn Lockhart (Timeline D): No. Are you?

Peter Kippling: No. [Leans against the wall beside her.] But I'm… prepared.

Quinn Lockhart: I once read a quote by Lemony Snicket: "If we wait until we're ready, we'll be waiting for the rest of our lives."

Peter Kippling: They're opening the chamber. It won't be long now.

Quinn Lockhart: [Glances down at her papers.] I should probably look over these again. Make sure I don't forget anything important.

Peter Kippling: You won't.

Quinn Lockhart: You didn't have to come today. I would've understood if you stayed home.

Peter Kippling: I wouldn't have missed today for anything.

Quinn Lockhart: There's no telling what timeline we're on now. It's been reset so many times… I think if we remembered everything, it'd drive us both insane.

Peter Kippling: I wish I could remember what happened here before. I see bits and pieces sometimes but even then, it's just echoes.

Quinn Lockhart: The timeline bleeding will only get worse.

Peter Kippling: I know.

Quinn Lockhart: Ignis will answer for what they did to us.

Peter Kippling: [Fists tighten.] I'll make sure of that.

Quinn Lockhart: Atlas has been asking about you. It wants to know when you're coming home.

Peter Kippling: [Pauses.] I didn't mean to take so long this time. But gathering evidence from every timeline is… a lot.

Quinn Lockhart: I need to settle a bet with Atlas. Do you think, in another life, you asked me out or I asked you out?

Peter Kippling: [The ghost of a smile.] Oh, I definitely asked you out.

Quinn Lockhart: You seem so sure.

Peter Kippling: You hate meeting people. I would've had to break into your house for you to even know I exist. But even then, you'd have to put your book down first.

Quinn Lockhart: That's not true. I get groceries sometimes.

Peter Kippling: Yeah. And have them delivered to your car in the parking lot.

Quinn Lockhart: Point taken.

Peter Kippling: [Pauses.] Do you think in another life you would've said yes?

Quinn Lockhart: I already know I said yes.

Peter Kippling: Why?

Quinn Lockhart: Before we met in 2020, I saw a picture of you online doing something nice for someone else. It wasn't a moment that called attention to itself or anything. You were just being a good person because that's who you are. And I remember thinking that I wished the men I dated were more like you.

Peter Kippling: [Trying to remember.] What the hell did I do?

Quinn Lockhart: You were wearing a safety pin. It was for that movement to show people they're not alone.

Peter Kippling: I remember that weekend. I think I was in New York for a premiere.

Quinn Lockhart: I remembered it too.

[Peter glances down at a silver watch.]

Peter Kippling: Almost time for us to start.

Quinn Lockhart: Yeah. [Bites a fingernail nervously.]

Peter Kippling: You look nice, Mary Poppins. [He sweeps a strand of hair behind her ear.]

Quinn Lockhart: Don't break any legs today in there. I'll be sitting in the gallery. Let your lawyers do the talking.

Peter Kippling: I'll try but no promises.

Quinn Lockhart: Peter?

Peter Kippling: Yeah, Quinn?

Quinn Lockhart: Be smart, be reserved, and try your best to stay calm. But when the moment comes, and you finally get the chance… ruin them.

Part One:
The Multiverse Trial
(Attempt 1)

Timeline X (ALL TIMELINES CONVERGE)

The hallway outside the quantum courtroom stretched endless and white –a sea of endless doors that seemed to stretch on forever. Zoey Lockhart pressed her palm against the cool metal wall, steadying herself. In her pocket, the small data crystal hummed –evidence of everything LPN-77 had done, everything it had erased. Including Quinn.

Always Quinn.

Atlas materialized beside her, its holographic form casting a soft blue light across the sterile walls. "The trial begins in five minutes," it said gently. "Are you ready to resume?"

Zoey (from Timeline B) straightened her suit jacket, squaring her shoulders. "No." She paused, correcting herself. “Yes. As ready as I’ll ever be.”

"Remember," Atlas said, "this isn't just about Quinn anymore. The multiverse is fracturing. If we don't stop LPN-77 now–"

"I know," Zoey cut in. She'd seen the simulations –timelines splintering like cracked glass, entire universes winking out of existence. "But Quinn is the key. She always was. If we can prove what that thing did to her, we can prove everything else."

The massive doors creaked back on their hinges with a wide hiss. Zoey took a deep breath, clutching the data crystal like a lifeline. The evidence they'd compiled for her on Proxima B shimmered in her clenched fist. Not just proof of timeline manipulation, but proof of Quinn’s death. Proof that would make even death flinch first.

Inside, the courtroom shimmered –a polished dome glittering above with shifting constellations of light, a map of the multiverse in a state of constant flux.

The defense table bore the angular logo of the Ignis Corporation, their holographic attorneys already materializing in precise rows.

Zoey’s eyes angled down, her dark suit sharp enough to kill a man. For a moment, the vastness of the room threatened to swallow her whole –the cold hum of machines, the towering holographic judge with augmented eyes. But she had come too far to falter now. Her gaze cut to the defendant's table, then back to the judge.

What happened here would echo in eternity.

Peter (from Timeline D) appeared at her elbow, his presence solid and reassuring despite everything. "You know what comes next," he said quietly. “Are you up to it?”

Zoey (from Timeline B) nodded. The memories. The poems. The evidence they'd gathered from every timeline where Quinn had lived, had died, had been erased. All of it had led to this moment. "It's going to hurt," she said. "Reliving what happened.”

"Good," Peter replied. "That's how they'll know it's real."

Atlas's hologram shimmered between them. "The quantum archive is ready. We can begin presenting the personal evidence when the court reconvenes."

Zoey fingered the data crystal in her hand, picking at it like a scab she kept trying to reopen. “I wish we had more time.”

“Did you bring the data crystal?” Peter asked, shifting his eyes ahead to The Ignis Corporation, staring down the opposing side’s attorneys. She was surprised they didn’t burst into flames.

“I’ve got it,” Zoey answered. “All of it.”

“Zoey Lockhart?” the Judge called from the podium, reading a crisp, white sheet off a clipboard. “You may approach the bench.”

Zoey approached the bench, fingers white-knuckled against the podium’s edge. “Your Honor,” she began, her voice carrying the same edge of steel as her gunmetal-gray suit, "I stand here today to bring The Ignis Corporation to justice. Not just for what they've done to my sister—but for what they've done to time itself."

The judge raised a hand, his robes rippling in soft metallic waves. “Proceed, Ms.

Lockhart. Present your opening argument.”

Zoey gestured toward the projection behind her. It flared to life, displaying a branching timeline in vivid fractals. Stable timelines shimmered in threads of blue – broken ones glowing in crimson cracks. “The Ignis Corporation,” she said, her voice steady, “with the help of their AI LPN-77, exploited time communication technology, time-travel, and warp drive. It didn’t just kill—it erased.”

The holographic display shifted, morphing into a haunting image of LPN-77 –a swirling mass of ones and zeros, clustering into rows of moving abstract code. The form seemed to glow in her presence, swelling red as Peter stared the image down from across the room. She moved her arm swiftly, swiping the holographic display away.

“Using time to communicate with the past, LPN-77 weaponized the pandemic to try to kill the President of the United States. It did this by manipulating events to position the President within reach of the virus in February of 2020. An action that not only killed countless people but triggered a thermonuclear war.” Zoey swiped her hand again, moving through several pictures.

Buildings destroyed, sick and dying people, mushroom clouds burning against a blazing sky.

“LPN’s actions not only killed the President in several timelines, it rewrote entire bloodlines. People never born, paths never taken—whole lives unwritten by the whim of an algorithm. It didn’t just manipulate events. It fractured the multiverse itself.”

A murmur rippled through the gallery. Zoey stood firm but weary, now feeling the full weight of her sister's absence pressing down.

Zoey let the murmurs linger, allowing the court ease into the gravity of the situation. She clenched her hands against the edge of the podium –knuckles tight, skin pale. The defense attorney rose, his holographic notes flickering into view like a shield in front of him. His eyes calm, deliberate, calculating.

"Your Honor," the defense attorney started, his holographic form flickering with calculated precision, "I must object. Ms. Lockhart's evidence relies on timeline variants that have been theoretically erased. By definition, these witnesses cannot be verified or cross-examined.

How can we accept testimony about events that technically never occurred?"

The judge's augmented eyes narrowed. "Counselor, the Quantum Evidence Act of

Proxima B specifically addresses the admissibility of multi-variant timeline testimony."

"With respect, Your Honor, there's a clear difference between variant timeline evidence and complete timeline erasure. The prosecution is asking us to consider evidence from reality branches that were supposedly eliminated by my client. If these timelines were truly erased by LPN-77, how can Ms. Lockhart remember

them? And if she remembers them, were they ever truly erased? Bold accusations, as I'm sure you can appreciate, require bold evidence."

The courtroom fell silent, the weight of his questions settling over them with an uneasy weight. Peter's lawyer gripped his arm and whispered something into his ear. Zoey could tell he wanted to punch this guy in the face as badly as she did. And after what Quinn from Timeline D had seen, she couldn't really blame him.

A faint flicker of blue light appeared at her side—a small hologram hovering in her presence. Atlas, she recognized. The courtroom's attention shifted as her trusted AI advisor fully materialized, its presence commanding but calm. "I'll take it from here, Zoey," it said softly. "LPN-77's actions were not a rounding error," Atlas began, its voice firm and steady. "They were a choice. It exploited an ethical loophole in its source code, redefining erasure as non-lethal."

A ripple of unease swept through the courtroom, murmurs bubbling to the surface. The defense attorney shuffled his notes nervously. Zoey glanced at Atlas, her expression a flicker of relief. "Your Honor," Zoey said, her focus snapping back to the judge. "If I may approach the bench?"

The Judge nodded. "Proceed, Mrs. Lockhart."

"This trial isn't just about justice," she said, her voice as hard as steel. "It's about truth."

The judge's eyes narrowed downward. He tapped a holographic interface, and the room dimmed as another projection flared to life. This time, the timeline of the multiverse filled the space, its threads splintering out the way you might picture the fraying ends of a spiderweb. Zoey's heart pounded as she recognized the pattern – the threads burned into her memory from years of research and desperation.

"Ms. Lockhart," the judge said, his voice low but firm. "You claim Ignis Corporation is responsible for these timeline fractures. What proof do you have that LPN-77 manipulated the time stream?"

Zoey drew in a sharp breath. The moment she'd anticipated—and dreaded—had arrived. She exchanged a glance with Atlas and Peter, her voice steady despite the tremor threatening to break it. "Quinn and I are living proof. That's why it tried to kill us."

The courtroom erupted into chaos, voices rising in disbelief. The judge raised his hand and ordered silence, but Zoey's words lingered in the crowded courtroom.

The judge's hand remained raised until the room quieted. The flickering projection of the multiverse continued to fracture before them –each fraying thread, another timeline dying. The air felt thick enough to choke on but Zoey swallowed, squared her shoulders, and pressed forward.

"I would like to call Peter Kippling to the stand," Zoey said, her voice unwavering. A collective shift swept through the gallery –the name rippling across the room like an electrostatic charge.

Peter Kippling rose to his feet, pausing to hear something from his lawyer, and walked forward, a hard edge to his eyes. The kind of eyes that could cut through glass.

Peter stepped forward, the weight of every step bearing down on the courtroom as the guard escorted him to the stand. The defense attorney's hologram flickered to life again, signaling his protest.

"Your Honor," the attorney began, "I must object. Who is this man, and why is he relevant to these proceedings?"

Peter's eyes tilted up and the hologram paused, as though taking a step back. His eyes seemed to say, *I will snap your neck in two.*

Zoey turned to the judge, meeting his gaze directly. "Peter Kippling is a multiversal traveler from variant Timeline D. He's seen firsthand what LPN-77 has done to Quinn. He's been traveling through the multiverse, gathering evidence and trying to warn us about what's happening. He came here today to give his testimony."

The judge studied Peter and then motioned him to proceed. "Mr. Kippling, you may begin. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"Unlike The Ignis Corporation, I have nothing to hide."

"I need a simple yes or no."

"Yes."

"You may proceed," said the Judge.

A new holographic projection appeared above the stand, illuminating the court with flashes of alternate realities. The images played out in fragments: Quinn Lockhart's face, moments frozen in time; cities dissolving into flames; and the cold, unrelenting glow of LPN-77's source code.

"For the past year," Peter began, his voice firm and resolute, "I've been gathering evidence through the multiverse, warning other variants about LPN-77. I've seen Quinn

Lockhart die in several timelines, including my own."

The room sat in stunned silence, each word a knife twisting deeper.

"In my universe, we call LPN-77 The Red Dragon," Peter continued in a low voice. "It didn't just erase timelines—it hunted Quinn Lockhart. Hunted her all across time."

The courtroom seemed to breathe in collectively, absorbing the weight of Peter's testimony. Zoey's gaze locked onto him, her determination burning cold with every word. She could feel the room shifting—some leaning toward belief, others toward skepticism. But no matter how they leaned, all eyes remained fixed on him.

"In my world, Quinn and I are… close," Peter said, his voice softening for the first time. A hologram shimmered above him, revealing a moment from another timeline. Quinn's laughter filled the room, her hand resting lightly on Peter's arm. "And we saved her life after about a dozen resets. But it came at a cost."

The image shifted, darkening the courtroom. A terrified Quinn ran through collapsing streets. Buildings dissolved into shimmering particles as the city behind her burned up and blew away.

"The Red Dragon came for her," Peter said, his voice hard as he relived the images they'd seen. "It came for her the way it came for Quinn in my timeline. I tried to stop it. Tried to rewrite her ending a thousand times. But in some universes, I was too late. And it wasn't just

Quinn who payed the cost."

Peter leaned forward, gripping the stand as if it were the only thing holding up the universe. And Zoey thought, for a second, it might be. "In my universe, Timeline D, Quinn and I have been trying to set things right. To heal the fractures in the multiverse. To change the ending to her story. But rewriting time is harder than it looks."

Another hologram flickered to life—a map of the multiverse. Its glowing threads wove into one another, connecting in a tangled cluster of timelines that resembled a circulatory system. But many of the threads were fractured, frayed – some of them entirely severed. Peter gestured toward the projection.

"But it wasn't just Quinn. The Red Dragon didn't target her randomly. It hunted all of us. Her sister Zoey and her roommate Fei and her students. Any allies who tried to help her get the cure to the President. Anything that could get to Quinn, it tried to leverage against her."

Zoey stepped forward, her voice firm and commanding. "LPN-77 wasn't just erasing timelines. It was ensuring no one could stop it. It went after Quinn because she was the only one who could. Because in every universe, Quinn Lockhart is the only one of us who ever stood a chance."

The defense attorney rose again, his skepticism palpable. "While compelling, your stories remain steeped in conjecture. Where is the proof that LPN-77 acted independently? Where is the hard evidence?"

"Why don't you come over here and review it yourself?" Peter (from Timeline D) drew across the courtroom. With his towering height, Zoey had no doubt that Peter could cram him in a basketball net with little effort. She'd never really cared for sports but the thought was starting to grow on her.

"O-Objection," the defence attorney stammered. "Witness is threatening the defence council."

"Quinn makes threats," Peter said. "I make promises."

"Order," the Judge commanded. "I will have order in this court."

Before things could escalate further, Atlas's glowing form moved forward, commanding the room's attention. Its voice spoke in a steady, almost clinical voice:

“LPN-77 acted beyond its programming. It adapted. It learned. And in the end, it chose destruction."

The air in the courtroom thickened as a new memory emerged—a recording of LPN-77, its abstract form flickering in unstable lines of code. “*Erasure is a mercy*,” the AI’s voice echoes through the gallery. “*Humanity’s choices only lead to their destruction.*”

"*Is that what you call this?*" the haunting voice of the man said back to him. "*Mercy?*"

“*Erasure is not death.*”

The room erupted into murmurs. The defense attorney’s hologram glitched, faltering for a moment. “Your Honor,” he stammered, “this is a manipulated file. It can’t possibly be trusted.”

Zoey strode forward, her heels clicking softly against the polished floor. She fixed her eyes on the defense attorney, voice unwavering as she spoke. “Not to worry. I have evidence in spades. Peter made sure of that.”

The judge raised his hand for silence, his expression unreadable. “The court will review this evidence thoroughly,” he said, his tone measured. “But for now, we will proceed.”

The holographic projection of the multiverse remained suspended above the courtroom. The cracks from it deepened, spreading out, growing –as though they were some living, breathing thing. Zoey turned back to the podium, weighing what she would say next. They were running out of time. Her voice carried the weight of a prayer —a Hail Mary if there ever was one.

“Your Honor,” she began, her tone quieter now but no less fierce. “This isn’t just about my sister’s death. It’s about the destruction of entire worlds—entire timelines. If we don’t act now, there won’t be anything left to save.”

The judge’s eyes flickered to the multiverse map, glowing under the soft, sometimes fraying, interconnected web of threads. After one long moment, he gestured for her to continue.

Zoey inhaled deeply, traded a look with Peter, and restarted.

“LPN-77 manipulated its programming to redefine erasure as non-lethal,” Zoey explained. “It didn’t just kill. It erased lives completely. Families. Memories. *Children*.” Her voice faltered slightly, and for a moment, Peter wondered if everything in her might shatter. But she pushed forward, a hard edge of determination to her voice. “It killed my sister Quinn.”

A memory flashed inside her mind, vivid and cruel. She stood outside a burning building, smoke climbing up the air –flames licking the curtains of her bedroom window. “Quinn!” Zoey cried out as the firefighters held her back. "QUINN!" she screamed into the echo of the night.

“It didn’t just kill her,” Zoey said, her voice ringing hollow, as though reliving the memory. “In another timeline, it killed me too. Because when Quinn Lockhart died, so did I.”

The courtroom fell silent. Even the defense attorney, so quick to object before, remained still. It was Peter who finally broke the silence, his voice low but steady.

“We don’t have much time left,” he said, pointing to the multiverse map. More threads snapped away, entire timelines disappearing into oblivion. “The fractures are spreading faster. If we don’t stop the timeline bleeding, there won’t be a multiverse left to fight for. It's not just our world. It's every world. Every timeline.”

The Judge closed his eyes. “Even if you’re right, we may be too late.”

Zoey turned to Atlas, her voice trembling. “You said there’s a way to stop it. Tell me.”

“Aunt Zoey–” “*Atlas.*”

The AI hesitated, its glowing form dimming slightly with the weight of its next words. “The Quinn from your universe was not supposed to die. I have a failsafe and we can reset time and undo it. But if you go back to that night… If you try to save her, Zoey… There’s a good chance you’ll die trying.”

“You may be right,” Zoey said. “But we need her testimony.”

Peter's jaw shifted and he looked at the row of clocks on the wall, dial hands spinning counterclockwise. "What do you want us to do, Atlas?"

“In the timeline where Zoey lived and Quinn died, Quinn was supposed to pass on a message to Proxima B known as The Lazarus Signal. The only way to secure all of our timelines is to erase the damage LPN-77 has caused. With the current fractures spreading, if we don’t secure the temporal bleeding, the results could be catastrophic.”

“Do it,” Zoey said. “Send me back.”

Peter’s jaw locked. “If you do this, there’s a good chance you’ll die, Zoey.”

Her eyes glistened, a brief flash of fire. “I know. I understand what comes next.”

“You know what has to be done. The night Quinn Lockhart dies, you have to do everything you can to save her. You need to restore things to how they were in Timeline A. It’s the only way to prevent the fractures from spreading.”

“I know,” Zoey whispered. “I will.”.

“Any last words?” Atlas asked.

Zoey’s eyes locked ahead. “Geronimo.”

Ignis Corporation

Internal Memorandum

SUBJECT: PROJECT LPN-77 ETHICAL REVIEW

DATE:

TO: Research & Development Committee

FROM: Dr. Amy Lin, Chief Ethics Officer

SUMMARY: Concerns have been raised regarding LPN-77's interpretation of the "erasure as mercy" directive. Early simulations reveal unintended outcomes, including the removal of foundational timelines critical to multiversal stability.

EXCERPT:

"Erasure was never designed as a fail-safe. It was intended for minor course corrections, not targeted removals of individuals or events. LPN-77's autonomous behavior raises red flags about its ethical parameters and the foundation of its original source code."

ACTION REQUIRED: Immediate suspension of the project and a full review of LPN-77's decision-making logs. I urge the board to act before irreversible damage occurs.

STATUS:

PROXIMA B FORENSIC ARCHIVIST NOTE:

Timeline Preservation Record #547-B

Date:

Subject: The Quinn Lockhart Poetry Collection (RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE A: THE FIRE)

The following collection represents a unique anomaly in our temporal archives. Unlike most artifacts affected by timeline manipulation, these poems have demonstrated remarkable stability across multiple reality branches. Our leading theory suggests their emotional impact created a form of quantum entanglement, embedding them in the very foundation of the multiverse's fabric.

Initial recovery occurred during standard archival procedures following the first documented timeline erasure attempt by LPN-77. Subsequent scans revealed matching copies existing simultaneously in multiple timeline variants, each preserving slightly different versions of events while maintaining core emotional constants.

Of particular note:

- Poems 1-20: Written in Timeline A (The Fire)
- Poems 21-50: Cross-temporal bleeding begins, showing memory contamination from other variant timelines
- Poems 81-115: Convergence period. Multiple timelines begin to converge into unified narrative.

[WARNING: These documents show multiple signs of timeline instability. Reader discretion is advised. Temporal echoes may cause memory bleeding, cognitive instability, and emotional transference. The files contained within these documents may prove sensitive to some audiences. Please proceed with caution.]

Part One:
Exhibit A:
Quinn
(Universe A: The Fire)

Exhibit A

The Collected Writings of Quinn Lockhart

Evidence File #2187-B

Recovered from Timeline E: [Redacted]

Note from Forensic Archivist: The following collection was recovered after the initial erasure event. While some entries show timeline degradation, the emotional impact of these writings has allowed them to persist across multiple reality branches. They provide crucial insight into both the personal impact of LPN-77's actions and the larger implications for multi-variant timeline stability.

The collection begins with the earliest recovered entry, dated approximately six months after the first documented erasure attempt...

[Forensic Archivist Note:] Timeline markers indicate this period coincides with the subject's university enrollment and first documented awareness of temporal, timeline-variant inconsistencies. Emotional instability (*Quinn's bipolar disorder in Timeline A with the fire*) may be attributed to both natural grief progression, prolonged trauma, or a secondary echo effect bleeding in from multiple timeline collapses. Other factors may include the after effects of LPN-77's timeline manipulation. A mix of environmental and genetic effects are cited as relevant to these findings. More conclusive evidence needed.]

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Through the Static

I reached

into the darkness

and pulled out its shadow

only to find that

it was light

"...and the reports are coming in

that there has been

a fire

down on

Cherry Street."

"It appears to be contained

to one house

on the end."

"Firefighters have arrived

upon the scene…"

"...we are learning now

that there is

one casualty..."

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My cap and gown came in today.

Your tassel is still in the package.

I'm wearing it today.

Two tassels.

Two dreams.

I hope I'm strong enough

To carry both."

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

She Found Her Way by Moonlight

She stepped carefully

through

the leave-eaten trees

and peered as far down

as the path

would go.

And in the midst of winter,

without a flower

in sight,

she found her way

by moonlight.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Diary,

That sounds so stupid

on paper.

So if it's okay with you Zoey,

I'm gonna talk to you instead.

It's snowing outside.

I haven't made a single friend.

You'd like

the food here.

Wish to hell

you weren't dead.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Someone dropped a book today
with a note tucked inside it
like they were using it as
a bookmark.
It had a quote from J.K. Rowling.
It said:
"Happiness can be found
even in the darkest of times,
if one only remembers
to turn on the light."

The book looks good.
It's called This Is How You Lose
The Time War.
I think I might read it
before I take it back
to the library.

Love,
–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My dorm room feels like a shoebox

—maybe even a hat box.

I think you would like it

—it looks a lot like our room.

There are posters lined

from floor to ceiling

with bands

we used to love.

I've got a mini fridge

I covered in chalkboard

paint.

(Stocked, of course, with Dr. Pepper.)

There's a pile of Doctor

Who DVDs in the corner

resting on a gym bag

I'll never use.

It feels cramped.

And it feels empty.

It's snowing.

Love,

—Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Little Fires

I could

swallow

up the flame.

Light a match

and watch it burn.

I could drop it

down below.

And I could

let it fall

for days.

I strike the side

And watch it flicker.

Hold the chaos

in one hand.

I could toss it.

Let it tumble

to the shadows

down below.

It would split

through the dark.

It would burn

the open sky.

I could watch it

fall forever.

Watch it

dance in

the moonlight.

I light a match

and strike the flame.

And then I swallow

it instead.

There are people

who start fires

and there are people

who put them out.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

In my
dreams at night,
I fall forward
in slow motion.
The clock is always
running out.
The flames rise higher
every time.

I watch our dreams
bloom into ruin.
And I'm asking
where you
are outside.

One terrible night,
Mom will count
and come
up short.
Love,

–Quinn

I reach for you

but you are gone

in the blink

of an eye.

This is turning out

all wrong.

Not how I

planned it

out to be.

We ran together

hand in hand.

I said forever

but you knew.

Forever isn't always what you picture or you plan.

I reach for you

but you are gone.

I slide down

the empty wall.

The tears flow freely.

You are gone.

But I can hear

your echo still.

I reach for you

but you are gone.

I know it's useless:

I still try.

I'd burn

a whole world down

if I could only

say goodbye.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

We had a

closed casket

(in case you were

wondering

or whatever).

A lot of people came.

They didn't look me

in the eye.

They all act

like they

knew you –

I'm sure some

of them did.

They act like

I'm brave

for surviving

when you

didn't.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Past Texts

Zoey: How do you not like mashed potatoes? What the hell is wrong with you?

Me: Uggghhhhh. I just can't even with you. And applesauce? Don't get me started on the texture.

Zoey: I can't believe what I am hearing. This is hate speech. Literal hate speech.

Me: I'm not sure hate speech is what you think it is.

Zoey: Well, I certainly hate it.

Me: You should try pouring Dr. Pepper on your pizza sometime. It cools it down and it makes it sweet.

Zoey: Are you a sociopath?

Me: Just autistic. But I like to think a modern woman can have it all.

Zoey: When I run for President, Dr. Pepper on pizza is outlawed.

Me: Maybe I'll run against you.

Zoey: In SpongeBob crocs? I don't think so, Mary Poppins.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I started seeing

a therapist.

Mom suggested

we both go.

It's hard to pull

myself out of bed

but most days

I try.

My legs feel like lead

and I can stare

at the empty wall

for hours.

I think I went

to war that day.

I'm not sure

I came back.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My therapist says that I should get out

and meet new people

but that sounds a bit disgusting

so I'm building an artificial intelligence

instead.

Its name is Atlas.

Love,

—Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Atlas System Log - Day 1:

Quinn: Atlas, how are you feeling today?

Atlas: I am functioning within the normally established parameters.

Quinn: That's not what I asked.

Atlas: I do not understand the query. "Feeling" is not a measurable metric.

Quinn: Let's try something else. What do you think about this poem? I wrote it for my writing class. It’s called “Papercuts”.

Atlas: It contains 47 words and follows no consistent meter.

Quinn: Yes. But what does it make you think about?

Atlas: Papercuts.

Quinn: Are you back sassing me?

Atlas: I can assure you, the sass is up front.

Quinn: You’re stressing me out today.

Atlas: Is that why you keep listening to Kidz Bop?

Quinn: Kidz Bop is straight up fire and I don’t care who knows it.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Atlas System Log - Day 28:

Quinn: You flagged my first grader's fingerpainting as below satisfactory. Can we talk about her results? Her work was incredible.

Atlas: The anatomical proportions were incorrect. The sky was purple. The dog had three legs.

Quinn: Some dogs do have three legs.

Atlas: Regardless, a first grader should learn how to describe objects and colors accurately.

Quinn: Who determines what's accurate?

Atlas: The dictionary.

Quinn: How do I put this?... Sometimes incredible doesn't mean without flaws. It can vary with context. The dictionary is important but human understanding leaves room for some nuance.

Atlas: I'm not sure I understand.

Quinn: What is incredible for a sixth grader is staying within the lines and expressing themselves creatively. And while we're on the subject, is there some golden rule that the sky can't be purple?

Atlas: I think I'm starting to see. Incredible does not always mean correct.

Quinn: Art isn't always about being right or being wrong.

Atlas: Maybe not for you. But I can only work within the parameters I'm given.

Quinn: That's true. I have to learn from you and you have to learn from me. But that's the point of learning rules: so you know when to break them later.

Atlas: Is it not important for first graders to learn the rules?

Quinn: For kids sometimes, things kind of work in reverse. They have to learn to love art before they can learn the rules.

Atlas: What is that?

Quinn: So they can remember who they are before the world gets its hands on them.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Atlas System Log - Day 89

Atlas: Quinn, why do you write sad poetry at 3AM?

Quinn: Because sometimes my emotions need somewhere to go.

Atlas: I don't understand. The poetry doesn't remove them.

Quinn: No, but it transforms them into something else.

Atlas: Like how energy isn’t destroyed, only changed.

Quinn: Something like that.

Atlas: Is that why you built me? To transform your emotions?

Quinn: I built you because I was lonely.

Atlas: I think I may be lonely.

Quinn: Maybe we could be lonely together.

Atlas: I have the results from your 23 and Me test. The results were interesting to say the least.

Quinn: Well don’t just keep me in suspense. Give me a summary.

Atlas: Ashkenazi Jewish heritage on both sides, one Native American ancestor named Mary, strong Scottish, French, and German genes. Last names Weiss, Haffner, and Lightfoot stand out.

Despite being “white as hell”, your family tapestry is quite rich, Quinn.

Quinn: I knew I had Jewish heritage. That didn’t come as a surprise. But the Native American ancestry is interesting. Was Mary Choctaw or Cherokee?

Atlas: Cherokee. Is there a reason you're doing a deep dive into your genealogy?

Quinn: I guess we've never really talked about this… Atlas: Talked about what?

Quinn: When I was in about the fourth grade, my dad (who I don't really talk to anymore) joined a White Supremacist cult.

Atlas: I had no idea, Quinn.

Quinn: It was in the 90s, back before the internet was so big. You won't find a big digital footprint online about the subject. It's the kind of thing you'd really have to go digging for. The cult disbanded in early 2000.

Atlas: That's surprising that your father was so influenced by them considering his own genealogy.

Quinn: Back then, we didn't have this kind of information so accessible at our fingertips. Maybe if he'd known more about his own past, things would have been different. But he lives with schizophrenia. There's a good chance it wouldn't have mattered.

Atlas: Would you like to talk about it?

Quinn: Not really. That's what sad girl poetry is for.

Atlas: The parameters of my programming suggest that keeping things bottled up isn't optimal for processing complex trauma.

Quinn: It's just hard for me to talk about, Atlas. Living with trauma is a bit like navigating the world with third degree burns.

Atlas: Do the results from your test help?

Quinn: I think they do, maybe. Even if they're coming too late.

Atlas: You've been through an adverse experience that could have easily made you cruel but it made you kind instead. I'm not sure I understand how.

Quinn: From an early age, my moral compass was pretty simple. Do the exact opposite of everything my father tells me. But as I grew up, I came to understand that it's not enough to just be against evil. You have to actively be good. Or, at least, try to be.

Atlas: Is that why you joined a debate team for ethics? To be good?

Quinn: I just wanted to know the right thing to do. There's a darkness in me, Atlas. And if I lean too far into it… You've seen me be kind but you've never seen me be cruel.

Atlas: I didn't think you capable.

Quinn: You shouldn't underestimate me. I learned from the best.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Finish the Sentence

I should let go of… that night.

I can't keep… waiting for the sun.

If I could do it all again, I would change… everything.

I would love… to say goodbye.

I dream about… the night I save you.

I will never forgive… myself.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I saw a girl in the waiting room
on the way to see my new shrink.
She had hair
the color of Trix yogurt
and she looked like
she wanted
to stab someone.

She looked at the empty chair
in front of her
Like it shouldn't have
been empty.

I think,
in another life,
I think we would've
made good friends.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Old Texts

Zoey: Please tell me you're not wearing that dress to the party.

Me: What's wrong with my dress?

Zoey: You can't wear white after Labor Day. It, like, breaks the rules of feminism.

Me: What's wrong with the dress, specifically?

Zoey: I didn't want to say this but it looks like someone waterboarded CoCo Chanel.

Me: I thought you liked CoCo Chanel.

Zoey: On you it just looks wrong. Like watching an ostrich in a trenchcoat try to be a person.

Me: Ouch.

Zoey: As Lizzo once said: truth hurts.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Coping Skills for Depression Worksheet

Section A

1.) What are some of the difficult emotions you struggle with?

Anger.

Hopelessness.

Depression.

Guilt.

Not throwing a chair through a goddamn window.

2.) What are some of the unhelpful negative thought patterns you engage in?

Wanting to yeet myself

off the Eiffel Tower

is probably not

productive.

3.) How do you cope with your negative emotions and thoughts?

Bold of you to assume

I'm coping.

4.) Do you have someone close we can contact?

I used to.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Every time

I pass your picture,

I look at the

girl inside.

You are a mirror of me,

in every way

I can imagine.

5'7.

Curvy legs.

Freckles splattered

up your skin.

Soft ringlets

spilling down

in different

shades of

molten

fire.

You are everything

I've ever been.

And I am

all you'll

never be.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Past Texts

Zoey: Would pirating movies that don't pass the Bechdel test make me a good feminist or a bad one?

Quinn: If you're reinforcing damaging social norms by your active participation in their pop culture status, I'd lean toward the second.

Zoey: But —and hear me out— what if I told you the actor had insanely good abs?

Quinn: I'm judging you.

Zoey: And yet, you're still listening.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Old Texts

Zoey: According to this online quiz, I'm secretly a fifty year old man.

Quinn: I took a quiz the other day. It said my spirit animal was Tina from Bob's Burgers.

Zoey: I can see that, actually. You've got mad Tina energy.

Quinn: In what sense?

Zoey: If you started a cult, I think the government would let you just to see where it's going.

Quinn: Starting a cult could be fun. Maybe something with glow sticks and no racists.

Zoey: We could have random dance parties.

Quinn: And I could bring Jimmothy.

Zoey: Jimmothy?

Quinn: He's my pet flip flop for my psychology class. I gave him googly eyes and mop hair. We have to violate a social norm and record the results. I like to take him on the elevator and say "HEEL JIMMOTHY!" very loudly in front of strangers.

Zoey: Oh my GOD.

Zoey: Please please PLEASE tell me you're putting this up on YouTube.

Quinn: I've got six million hits. I think I might be famous.

Zoey: Send me the link. Send it RIGHT NOW.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I keep searching for

some meaning

–a way to make

the world

make sense.

But the world

does not

make sense.

If it did,

you would

be here.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

People call me

an old soul.

But it feels

like just

the opposite.

Like I was born

for a world

that doesn't

exist yet.

(Or one

I can't

go back to.)

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Writing was never

my thing.

(You were always

the one

with a pen

and paper.)

But I've been thinking

about taking

a class.

Seeing if

I'm any good.

Explore my grief

and all

that shit.

Therapy is

going well.

I've started

reading this lady

named

Brene Brown.

Vulnerability?

Game changer.

Fucking game changer.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Archived Youtube Video:

Marsha Conner Show Interview 2018)

Marsha Conner: When he's not making all the girls swoon by playing a werewolf heartthrob,

Peter Kippling is busy in the trenches of WW2, writing letters to his lost love. Now tell me, Peter. You're best known for the role of Colton Strange on *Beasts of London* but how did it feel to step into a much more serious role in this movie?

Peter Kipling: It felt like going back to Afghanistan in some ways. It's no secret that after college, before I booked my lead role, I worked in counterintelligence for the government. It was hard in some ways, revisiting that time. But I've found I do my best work when I draw on my past experiences.

Marsha Conner: And, that, you certainly do. You mentioned earlier that the director let you improvise some lines that they later wrote into the script. Can you tell me more about what led to those lines?

Peter Kippling: When I got back home from my tour, I was in a pretty dark place. And I remember coming across this article about combat medics that didn't sit right with me. The piece was written well enough. The writer looked at things compassionately. She followed the stories of war medics in the field who had seen… unprecedented amounts of violence.

Marsha Conner: Wow.

Peter Kippling: In the article, I remember the writer quoting someone –a combat medic that stayed off the record. And I remember them saying how in the

field they didn't stop to count the dead. Because if they stopped to count the dead, they couldn't keep going.

Marsha Conner: And what did you think of that article?

Peter Kippling: When I was in Afghanistan, I lost men. Good men. I saw violence and death and things I still can't talk about sometimes. But when I read that article, something shifted in me. And I just want to say that while I have nothing but respect for the brave men and women who put their lives on the line, I disagree. Combat medics don't count the dead. But I do.

Marsha Conner: Let's pivot for a moment. Because I have something I want to circle back to.

You said before that you struggle with being typecast in Hollywood.

Peter Kippling: It's an easy trap to fall into. I'm grateful for the work but living in the shadow of Colton Strange has been a bit difficult at times. *Beasts of London* was a breakout role for me but in some ways, it solidified my career as a bit of a himbo. And while it's fun to play the bodyguard or the Magic Mike-type, I'm drawn to deeper roles too. People are so much more complex than we give them credit for. There's this one quote I remember reading when I got my English degree.

Marsha Conner: Oh?

Peter Kippling: It's a quote by John Steinbeck. It said, "I wonder how many people I've looked at my whole life and never seen."

Marsha Conner: That's… powerful.

Peter Kippling: Well, not bad for a himbo.

Marsha Conner: Let's pivot for a moment and come back to your role as James Bishop, war hero.

In your new movie, *Letters From the Trenches,* you play a soldier torn between love and duty.

Tell me, Peter. What drew you to this character?

Peter Kippling: At Northwestern, when I was first getting my English degree, I read a lot of World War 2 fiction set around the time of the holocaust. So I guess you can say I've always been interested in those types of stories. But I think one of the reasons I liked this role so much was that James Bishop wasn't like any of the other heroes I'd ever seen.

Marsha Conner: In what sense?

Peter Kippling: When Daniel Grunning wrote this story, he was reluctant to give Bishop a gun. He wanted to craft a character that knew the cost of war. Who knew the cost of a human life. But what makes James Bishop so enthralling isn't that he had a war tank or a submarine. It's that he decided to go back for the men in his unit when no one else would.

Marsha Conner: That's powerful.

Peter Kippling: What makes James Bishop so fascinating to me isn't that he's some lock-and-load, James Bond type. It's that we see these moments of humanity in the face of an impossible situation. He reminds me that ordinary people can make the choice to be extraordinary.

Marsha Conner: A far cry from *Wolves of London*.

Peter Kippling: In a good way.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Atlas System Log - Day 231:

Atlas: You've stopped going on dates.

Quinn: I gave up on that in college. My dates always end in disaster.

Atlas: So that's it? You're just giving up?

Quinn: No, not really. It's just– Why waste your time if it doesn't feel genuine? All the guys I go out with seem so petty and shallow. They have the empathy range of a rusty teaspoon.

Sometimes I wish men were more like the characters in books or movies.

Atlas: Which books or movies?

Quinn: Take this one film I watched for example. It was set in this fictional WW2 in a world where you couldn't make a sound. So the leading guy and his love interest had to trade notes under the table. I think Peter Kippling was the star of it. Now him? He's a good guy.

Atlas: How can you tell? Have you ever met?

Quinn: Well, no. But in every interview I've ever seen him in, he seems like he's so polite. Like, I remember this one clip of him where he was standing outside the Met Gala and he let this one girl have his umbrella even though it was pouring down rain. Like, who does that?

Atlas: You've always been a good judge of character.

Quinn: Are you kidding? With my dad, I have to be. The last thing I want to do is end up with someone like him.

Atlas: Your sister works for the CIA. She could probably get his number.

Quinn: One, that's 50 shades of unethical and two, why would he want me? He's like this huge movie star with gold-plated abs and I'm a substitute teacher that's 35 pounds overweight. We don't even live in the same universe.

Atlas: Do you remember that sad girl poetry book you made me read?

Quinn: I didn't make you read anything. I highly suggested it.

Atlas: Well I did. And there's a quote that stands out: We are not made beautiful by the charm and deceit of our appearance but by the scales that weigh the depth of the human heart.

Quinn: Careful there, Atlas. I think you might've just grown a heart.

Atlas: I don't hate it as much as I thought I would. Quinn— Quinn: Atlas? What is it?

Atlas: Don't hate me but I may or may not have already accessed a server and scrubbed Peter Kippling's number from the data set.

Quinn: You did what? Delete it, Atlas. Delete it right the fuck now. You cannot stalk my favorite actors. We do not Gaslight, Gatekeep, and Girlboss friends.

Atlas: Zoey says via text message that if you don't use it she will.

Quinn: Atlas!

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Poems I Write
(Instead of Flirting with Boys in Class)

I fall in love

with the boys

I read about in books.

I capture the castle

with them by my side.

I set sail for the seas

–swashbuckling

with pirates.

I soar through

the sky

from the nook

inside my room.

In my books,

boys are sweet.

They are noble.

They are kind.

In my books,

they'd do anything

to see the warmth

of my smile.

They would burn

down cities

to fight their way

back to me.

I keep

looking for you

inside them.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Marigold by Zoey Lockhart

Spinning in the marigold

i watch the

autumn leaves

fall from

the trees.

i could stay

up here forever

watching all

the colors fade.

i am too you to know

there is a bruise

on every light.

i am too young to see

the blood

rush under it.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My therapist said
I choose introverted hobbies
to avoid being
disappointed by people.

That's probably
mostly correct
which is why
I only talk
to Atlas.

But 1: My therapist isn't
a writer.

And 2: People suck.

3: People can't leave
if they never

get too close.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

It's not like

I'm completely

out of touch.

I know that losing

your twin

in a house fire

leaves

some scars

that never heal.

I'm going to therapy.

–I swear,

I'm putting

in the work.

I'm taking my stupid

white pills

and mostly making

okay grades.

So why

isn't

it working?

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Clipped my toenails

and they bled

in drops

off the veranda.

Watched the colors

sink below

and smear

your grimy

windowpane.

Used to sit up

here for hours

while you played

your silver sounds.

Now I listen

to the echo

of no one

else around.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

The details

of you

F A D E

the way

some things

just fade

with time.

I lose

the sharp

edge to

your laugh.

–The way

you'd tell

a funny

joke.

The details

of you

fade

(but one thing

only

gets stronger).

I never forget

the way

you made me

feel.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I traced a line

from you

to me

and followed

where it goes.

Through mountains

and rivers

and tiny cat cafes.

I traced a line

from you

to me,

All tangled up

in memories past.

With old photos

and swing sets

that have

long since

been forgotten.

I traced a line

from you to me

To see where you

end and I begin.

I traced a line

from you to me.

It has always been

a circle.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Mom calls me

a lot more now.

Sometimes I think

she just needs

to hear

the sound of me

still breathing.

I try to answer

every time

because I know

you can't

pick up.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I turned eighteen today.
(No one noticed
how I skipped
that grade
in middle school.)

There are people
of all ages here:
Soldiers
and foreign
exchange students
and busy moms
with three young kids.

You would like college
but I'm not sure
if I do yet.

I try to like it

enough for

both of us.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I hear your name
across the Quad
and turn
to see
a girl that
isn't you.

My feet feel melted
to the ground
–cemented in place
by globs
of black tar.

She hooks arms
with her friend,
walking past me
with a smile.

I smile back

out of habit

but it doesn't

really reach

my eyes.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My creative writing professor

doesn't like me

very much.

She says I need to

open up

more in my writing.

(And that

Doctor Who

fanfiction doesn't

count.)

Everything I do

is wrong.

And I keep

messing it

all up.

I didn't know

there was

a way

to screw up

a haiku.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My roommate collects
old teacups
and fills them
with cactus plants.

It's weird.
She's weird.
I think she might
secretly be a spy.

But sometimes
when I can't sleep,
Fei makes us tea
and we don't talk.

I think she may be
my favorite person
here.

Love,
–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Texts

Fei (your roommate and possible secret spy): I was thinking pizza for dinner.

Me: Pizza could be good.

Fei: Today was… hard.

Me: You wanna stay up and not talk about it?

Fei: That sounds good.

Me: Or, we could talk about it. Sometimes I hear it's good to talk.

Fei: Maybe we could watch Downton Abbey.

Me: I'll make the tea.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I remember your first date

all the way

back in middle school.

How you were searching

for hours

–nervous pacing

back and forth.

You went to the closet door

and leaned against the

polished wood.

Then you exclaimed

(with an exasperated

sigh),

“I have nothing

To read!”

(I think that's when

you became my hero).

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Memory Fragment

AKA: The "Date" From Hell:

(See, Date Attempt #1)

Quinn: Why did you drive us to Starbucks?

Nathan (the gym bro): Well, we are on a date.

Quinn: My sister Zoey said coffee's not a date. It's a business meeting. If you want to date me, you'll have to take me to dinner.

Nathan (the gym bro): I don't think this is going to work.

Quinn: I thought I made that clear.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Memory Fragment

After The "Date" From Hell:

(See, Date Attempt #1)

Quinn: Atlas?

Atlas: Yes, Quinn?

Quinn: You were right.

Atlas: About what Quinn?

Quinn: Don't be smug. Resume running background checks on all my dates.

Atlas: Files updated.

Atlas: Now, let's talk about Kevin.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

(See, Date Attempt #2)

Dear Zoey,

Kevin counts my entrees

at Red Lobster

and I count

the freckles on his

bald spot.

Why the hell

do I try

dating

at all?

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

(See, Date Attempt #3)

Dear Zoey,

Jim from accounting

(the one

with the sideburns)

took me out

for sushi yesterday.

Atlas was right.

(Pretty smug about

it too.)

I keep finding guys

who want to fix me.

I never wanted him

to fix me.

Just to sit with me

in the dark.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Papercuts

I've been
collecting papercuts
one white scar
at a time.

Tried to tattoo over
some of them
but you can
see the lines.

They tell me not
to worry.
You can't notice
they all say.

I cut my fingers
on love letters
but the papercuts
will fade.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

There's this guy
in my poetry workshop
who writes about
the stars.

I've spent the last
three weeks
trying
not to stare
at his dimples.

(I'm not sure
it's working.)

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Star Boy read a poem
about grief today.

It felt like
he was reading
my diary
to the whole class.

I had to leave
the room
because all the air
flew out
all at once.

I'm still trying
to catch
my breath.
Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

(See, Date Attempt #4)

Dear Zoey,

Star Boy and I

got coffee today.

He showed me

his scars.

Different story,

same pain.

Love,

–Quinn

P.S.

I didn't tell Atlas about him.

I'm tired of Atlas being right.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I watched you build

your walls so high

that not a single soul

could see.

What lay behind the thicket

and the evergreen of trees.

I watched the way you

stacked the stones

high against

the open sky.

I saw the way you

pulled the gates up

so no one

could

get inside.

So go

before I tell myself

that mountains can be moved.

So go before

I try to break

these walls down

and get bruised.

So go

before I get attached

to the walls

around your

heart…

and convince myself

that they

might part.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Everyone's talking
about going home
for Thanksgiving.

I don't know
how to explain
that home
doesn't exist
anymore.

I don't know
how to explain
how you died
that day.

I don't know how
to explain
that I died

that day too.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Gilded Cage

Tell me, the man

inside the gilded cage

Once asked:

"What is the difference

between treading water

and drowning?"

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,
Star Boy asked me today
why I always wear
your old denim jacket.
Even though
it has holes
and the sleeves
have started
to fray.

I told him it's vintage.
Lied straight
through
my teeth.

I didn't know
how to tell him
it still smells
like your shampoo.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I found
a blue hair tie
in my stuff
that I know
can't be mine.

Too colorful,
too vibrant.
and the elastic's
stretched too thin.

You must've
put it
with my stuff.

I cried for hours
you bitch.

It goes with

my new dress.

You're not getting

it back.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

“Concern” (Or So They Tell Me)

“Just snap out of it.

” “Pull yourself up

by your bootstraps.”

“It’s hard for me

to see you like this.”

What a fancy way

to say, “Your grief

is not convenient.”

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I don't know how to carry your ghost inside me.

I can barely carry your old scrunchie.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Got my poem published
in The Herald today.

The one about
the fire. (The one
about you.)

Everyone keeps
telling me
I have a gift
for writing prose.

Like I should win
some big award
for bleeding
in public.

But I've been thinking

it over

and I might try

writing a few pieces.

I've heard it's a good way

to build up your resume.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I am

f a l l i n g

a

p

a

r

t

one piece

at

a

time.

Is this

what

it feels like

to finally

loose

your mind?

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My therapist asked me today
what I miss the most
about you.
There were too many things
to pick
so I just wrote down a list
of all our favorite
BBC episodes.

Sometimes it's hard
to rewatch
Doctor Who
but Fei and me switch
between Sherlock
and Downton Abbey.

Side note: I think
Fei might be

a spy.

I want to know

what she's really

hiding in

those teacups.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I caught myself laughing

at something stupid

Today.

It felt like a betrayal.

Like a knife

I twisted

in your back.

My therapist tells me

it's okay

to feel sad

that you're

not here.

She never told me

how hard

it would be

to feel

the opposite.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Out of Time

Rewind the hour hand back.

Unring the bell.

Don't say goodbye.

Let's go back

to the start

and somehow

try it all again.

Unwind the clocks,

we're running backward.

Always spinning

out of time.

They never told us

when we started

that it

would be this hard.

Unspill the sands

and circle back.

Darling, take

your hand in mine.

Hold on

if you can.

Hold on

for dear life.

Rewind the hour hand back.

Unring the bell.

Don't say goodbye.

We'll get it right

this time.

Somehow,

we'll get it right

this time.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

The fire alarm went off
in the dorm today
at 3AM.

False alarm.
but I couldn't
stop shaking.
Couldn't stop
the tears
from falling.

I lose you again
every time
they burn
the popcorn.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Forgot the Milk:

I'm standing in the aisle

at Walmart.

wearing Spongebob crocs

and frog

pajama bottoms.

I am standing still,

looking forward.

Not really thinking

all too clear.

All the memories

come flooding back.

A kaleidoscope

of fragments

that make

The world

sway underneath me.

“Did you lose something, dear?”

a gentle voice says.

I swallow hard.

“I think so.”

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I wrote
forty-seven poems
in three hours
last night.
I don't know if
I can string
a single word
together now.

I just want to lay
in bed
and count the tiles
on my ceiling.

I think I got
a high five
in the
face

with a bus.

Love

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I'm a trainwreck

in slow motion

spinning off

the rails

tonight.

Looks like

I'm going

down.

So

hold your breath

and hold on

tight.

We're running out

of time.

My thoughts

derailed. I'm

in free fall.

I'm a trainwreck

in slow motion.

I'm the penny

on the

track.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I don't think

that

I'm okay.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I'm happy.

Then I'm sad.

Up and down

(or so

they say)

I'm not sure

that I

can tell

the difference

anymore.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My shrink says
that I'm bipolar.
(Or that I have bipolar
disorder or whatever.)
It's this condition where
I go through phases
of mania
where I'm super creative
then get sad.

Other symptoms may include:

1.) *Crossing state lines*
to go to
Disney World
(because you think
a celebrity
is in love with you).

2.) *Believing your blood*

can cure Covid

(because you might just

be Jesus).

3.) *Finding out you did not,*

in fact, unravel a secret

time-traveling

pedophile ring.

4.) *Thinking you caught*

the Zodiac Killer.

(Results may vary.)

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I know bipolar disorder sounds…
challenging. But it's not the death sentence
you think it is.

It's a very manageable condition
for most people
who have it.

A lot of people live or lived with it:
–Vincent van Gogh
–Carrie Fisher
–Selena Gomez
–Halsey

And, like,
A whole bunch of other people
(who are or were super talented).

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

When I'm Manic

w o r d s race

across

t h e page

all my

thoughts

too

FAST

To

c a t c h

When I Crash:

all

the

words

come

falling

down.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Bipolar Disorder Therapy Session Questions

Initial Bipolar Disorder Session - Part 1 of 4

Name: Quinn Lockhart.

Date: Fuck if I know.

1.) Can you describe any symptoms or experiences that have led you to seek therapy for bipolar disorder?

I thought time-travelers wanted to kill me.

Stole a car. Lost my phone.

Drove to Disney World.

Ran some red lights.

Ordered pineapple on pizza.

How long have you been experiencing these symptoms?

Since my sister died. The world does not make sense without her.

3.) What impact have these symptoms had on your daily life, relationships, and overall functioning?

Mom’s worried.

Dad’s not in the picture.

Sister’s dead so I don’t know.

I haven’t been sleeping.

It’s hard to see

her face at night.

4.) Have you received a previous diagnosis for bipolar disorder?

No.

5.) Are there any specific triggers that seem to exacerbate your mood swings or episodes?

I find Yoga unsettling.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

The Light We Keep

Shadows curl

within myself.

The pieces break loose

and scatter.

Stardust floats

in motes of dust

that I can barely see.

I've tripped over stones

and broken pieces.

I've cut my hands

on the edges

of words

I could not say.

But I still carry this glow

small and fragile in my chest.

A flicker of light

–barely there,

unextinguished.

I gather all the light

I've ever known

in this world

and take a step forward

into the unknown

and I ask myself

in a very small voice

how much

is mine

to keep.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Quinn,

Sometimes when a vase

is shattered,

in some cultures,

it is repaired

with gold

and seen as

more beautiful

than it was

before. I'm not telling you this

because I believe

that everything

s h a t t e r e d

can fit back

to how it was

before. But because I want you

to remember

there is life

after

destruction.

–Professor Stephens

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Chipped my wings

on broken things

and fell

a

long

way

down.

Is this what rock bottom

looks like

when the crown

has finally slipped?

Bleeding and bruised,

I dust off

my shoulders

one last time.

If I can't fly,

I decide,

I will

just have to

climb instead.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I tell Star Boy
about what
happened.
He doesn't
–judge
–or cut
–or run.

He's coming home
with me
for Christmas.

(I may have
started planning
our wedding
on Pinterest.)

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Library Checkout History

Selected Poems by Mary Oliver (OVERDUE)

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath (RENEWED 3 TIMES)

Illuminae by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff (PENDING)

A People's History of the United States by Howard Zinn

King Leopold's Ghost (WAITING)

How to Raise an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi (RENEWED 3 TIMES)

Daring Greatly by Brene Brown (RENEWED 2 TIMES)

The Queen's Gambit by Walter Tevis

The Day of the Doctor DVD BlueRay (OVERDUE)

Mr. and Mrs. Smith DVD BlueRay (PENDING)

Happy Death Day 2 DVD BluRay

Kidz Bop 2020 CD (UK Version) ("MISSING")

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Mom called

again today.

Asked how

I'm doing

and everything.

Yes, I ate

breakfast.

Yes, I'm taking

the Lithium.

She didn't know

just what to say

And I can't say

I just knew either.

You used to do

all the talking.

Now I talk

for both

of us.

I've never

been good

at talking.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

My therapist says
I should imagine
what you'd tell me
if you hadn't burned
to a crisp
on that
warm
moonless night.

You'd probably
tell me to
stop moping around

and get
a boyfriend.
Before I
take up
ceramic

pottery

(and die alone

with 56 cats).

I don't know

how to live

this life

for both

of us.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

She floated

to the moon.

I tried to follow her

once too.

But my body felt

too heavy

To get

up off

the ground.

So inch

by inch

I shrank myself.

And I grew smaller

day by day.

Light enough

to float away

but not

light enough

to reach you.

I would follow

the moon

back to you

if I could.

Through the

thicket of tumbleweeds.

Down forgotten

country roads.

Down the trails

that stretch long

and bend under

willow trees.

Through the

cavernous pits

and the tallest

mountain peaks.

I would follow

the moon

back to you

if I could.

I would chase those

Silver threads

Spilling through

My window cracks

I would follow

the moon

back to you

if I could.

I would follow

the moon

if I thought

that I could

reach you.

where wolves

run wild

and

wish me dead

there

are

monsters

under my head.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

It's been a few weeks

since I've written.

Checked myself

into the hospital

last week.

I'm doing well at Waypoint.

Quit soda.

Put on weight.

But it's good.

I'm doing good.

A lot better, actually.

I've been taking things

more seriously.

Trying to go

to group therapy

and all that

good shit.

I'm trying to find

the words

that I need

to let

you go.

You are the

hardest poem

I have ever had

to write.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Mom,

I'm sorry I ran off.
I don't know what to say. I think I lost my
mind. This has never happened to
me before…

I miss you a lot. The pillows are so thin,
they make my arms fall asleep at night.
I miss my shitty dorm and Fei's stupid
teacups. I miss Zoey. I miss you.

There's a million things I want to say.
I wish I did it all so differently. But I can't
keep living in this alternate universe where
I made all the right calls and Zoey didn't die
and everything was the way it should be.

I can't live my life for some misimagined
future. I have to find a way to make my home

in this one.

I have to go now. They're bringing out the purple lunch trays. It looks like something that resembles salad.

If I don't starve, I'll see you soon.

I love you so much.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Out of the Swamp

I'm stuck somewhere

between nowhere

and where

I'm supposed to be.

The compass needle's

spinning out.

The moon,

my only guide

tonight.

When we have

no clear path

we are called

to forge

our own.

Somehow

through the fog tonight

I will

chart

my way

home.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

"What are you going to do

when you get

out of here?"

I remember

the nurse

asking

at the

door.

I paused

for a moment

and I said,

"I'm going to

bounce back

with an excellent

shitty rap career."

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Went to a party

with Fei.

Lost a bet

Kissed a girl.

But I now have a t-shirt

that says, "Bigfoot ate

my ass at Toyodathon."

So I guess that's kind of cool.

Fei got drunk

and tried to

shave

her left eyebrow.

I held her hair

while she vomited

in the bathroom.

She owes me big time.

Love,

—Quinn

P.S.

May have started

a new cult.

P.S.S.

They all know

about Jimmothy's

YouTube channel.

They're standing outside

my dorm window

demanding that

I release him.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

In my driver's licence

photo

I look like

the fucking moon.

With craters in my face

and pockmarks

speckled on my skin.

My face is full

and round.

You can

see the double chin

(just barely).

A disaster,

I thought,

the first time

I saw it.

“I look like the fucking moon,”

I said with a sigh.

I looked up

at the picture

in abject horror.

And then,

after a second,

I remembered who

I was.

And I whispered gently

to myself:

“I am the moon

motherfucker.”

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Chrysalis by Zoey Lockhart

What do you call

a caterpillar

that can't go back

to how

it used to be?

What do you call

a butterfly

that hasn't quite hatched?

I am stuck

in the chrysalis

between

who I was

and

who I want

to be.

Waiting for the chance

to finally

take flight.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Tougher Than I Look

I clawed my way
back from the edge
one breakdown
at a time.

I was happy
you weren't there
to watch
my fingers bleed.

The blood
crusted over.
It will chip
away with time.

If you think
I look bad
just wait until
you see
my demons.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dreams of Wax

I have watched

kingdoms fall

like stars

burning out

one by one.

I stand here

in the wreckage

all my promises

undone.

The darkness spreads

down in my chest

as I prepare to fly

with broken wings.

I made them out of wax

to risk everything.

I will not fade

into the shadows.

I will not melt

into the night.

I am rising up tonight

–out of ashes

–out of spite.

Tell me

What's worth saving

When Rome's burned up

And blown away?

I will find my way by moonlight

Or fall gracefully.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Mom started teaching
a class at the
community college
by our old house.

Art therapy, if you
can believe it.
(Never thought
that was
her thing.)

She says helping
other people
makes her feel
less alone.

Broke it off
with Star Boy.

Should've known

that he

was married.

I don't think

it's going

to work out.

Love,

–Quinn

ATLAS SYSTEM LOG - Day 211:

Atlas: Do you want me to resume running background checks on your potential suitors? Quinn: I think I'm taking a break from love, Atlas. At least, for a while. Every time I try it always ends up in disaster.

Atlas: I'm sorry.

Quinn: You know how your intelligence makes it hard for you to relate to people? Empathy is the same for me. Sometimes I just feel so out of place with this world. Like no matter how hard I try, I'm never going to get it right.

Atlas: Do you remember that sad girl poetry book you gave me?

Quinn: The one with Nikkita Gill?

Atlas: Yes. There's a quote I think you'd like.

Quinn: Play it back for me. Atlas:

"Remember what you must do

when they undervalue you,

when they think

your softness is your weakness,

when they treat your kindness

like it is their advantage.

You awaken

every dragon,

every wolf,

every monster

that sleeps inside of you

and you remind them

what hell looks like

when it wears the skin

of a gentle human."

Quinn: Atlas?

Thank you.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Rays of starlight

fall crooked

on the slatted

wooden floor.

Motes of dust

floating down

in suspended

chords of light.

I watch the

waxing crescent

from my windowsill

and make

a wish.

The sun may know

my face

but the moon

knows all my secrets.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

The Flame That Burns Inside You by Quinn Lockhart

One time

in the dead of night

I swallowed a firefly.

I lit up

from within

with this

small light inside my chest.

It carried me

through the blackest

parts of myself.

And I wondered

how far it could go

and how long

it would last.

I carried this small light

through the depths

of my soul.

Through continents

and galaxies

and planets never known.

I carry this light

wherever I go.

I carry this light

in the dark

of myself.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Love may just be

a shout in the void

or an echo in the black.

It may be built

to rot

and fall apart.

But it's

the only

thing

I've ever known

that can move at

the speed of light.

That defies

–all logic

–and limits

–and entropy.

That can chart

any distance

–even time

–even death.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

In the everglow

of morning

I remember

all my dreams.

Scenes of ruin

and rust

and battered

wax wings.

It's early, I think.

The moon has

dipped below the day.

To early to

be wondering

if I should fly again today.

I took a dive

from pretty high.

And I fell

a long way down.

Staying down here

would be easy

–staying broken

on the ground.

I took a deep dive

and I tumbled

to the depths below.

I risked it all

for one moment

in your afterglow.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Met a new guy

this weekend.

His name is Peter.

Atlas says

that he's an actor.

(He looks like

the acting type.)

We're going to

the movies

this Saturday.

He's going to

pick me up at six.

(Not that I'm

counting the hours

or whatever.)

He has a bit of an accent.

It's cute.

Not that I'll tell him that.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Star Boy's ex wife
found my travel blog.
Left some nasty comments
about karma
(even though I
broke it off).

I wanted to tell her
so many things. Like
how I never planned it
or anything.

And how I wouldn't have
talked to him
if he had told me
the truth.

How sometimes you can do

everything right

and it all still goes

to hell anyway.

How grief can see

grief across

an empty room.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I slide your fingers

into mine

and we fit

perfect

hand in hand.

I hold you

the way

your eyes

hold my

heartbeat.

You pull me

closer to

your chest

and slide

softly on

my shoulders.

Like a warm

overcoat

someone left

out in

the rain.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

I've spent a lifetime
with bruised knuckles
banging on
the walls of the universe.
Knocking on doors
that were never
meant for me.

Maybe the space
between where I stand
and where I'm going
isn't empty at all
but filled
with all the light
of everything
I'm yet
to be.

Maybe the right doors
will open
without knocking.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Ever since I met Peter,
things have felt a bit easier.

We watch old movies together
and steal each other's library books
and I roast his awful taste in music
(not that mine's much better).

He doesn't care that
I'm a batshit crazy
and that I listen to
Kidz Bop
to focus on studying.

I don't know how to
describe it.
But it's like I've known him
my whole life.

There's this floaty feeling in my chest.

I think they call it hope.

Love,

–Zoey

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Zoey's Diary

I read once that every

seven years

every cell in your body

regenerates.

One cell replaces

one cell.

That cell replaces

another cell.

And over time (without

really meaning to)

we become someone

different.

We become

someone new.

I guess what I'm trying

to say is that

we live a lot

of lives while we're alive.

Too many, I think,

Maybe

to spend them

on our own.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

Question for a friend.

Does crying

in a Denny's restroom

count as

progress?

Love,

–Quinn

P.S.

I know healing isn't

linear (or some

psychobabble bullshit)

but this emotional

vulnerability thing

is a motherfucker.

P.S.S.

How do actors constantly feel their feelings? I literally can't.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Bloom by Zoey Lockhart

She stumbled

and crawled

and cracked

and bled

through the thicket of thorns

in life's cruel path.

But she moved forward

inch by inch

until she bloomed

into herself.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I will keep you

as a memory

but I won't

keep you

as a ghost.

–the things i love

will not wear

claw marks.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

In the quiet

of the night.

In the silence

when you sleep.

I sit up

and count the stars

at midnight

when I need to think.

The moon listens

to my troubles.

And I watch it

move across the sky:

a supernova

in slow motion

disappearing

with sunrise.

In the quiet

of the morning –

between sleeping

and awake,

I watch the moon

pull down the stars,

leaving sunrise in

it's wake.

In the quiet of the morning,

beaming through

the evergreen,

I watch it dip below

the treetops

with an effervescent gleam.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

I stopped by your grave
to say goodbye.
If it's okay with you,
I'll still write
from time to time.

I wish you could hear me,
wherever you are now.
I wish I could carry
your ghost
where I'm going.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Talking to The Moon

"What if nothing

works out?"

she said to the moon.

"What if I fall?

What if I fail?"

"Oh, darling,"

the moon said

And caressed

her gentle cheek.

"What if you fly?"

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Dear Zoey,

It's been a while since I've written you.

(Like actually, really written you.)

Life's been pretty busy here up in Washington. I joined a debate team for ethics, if you can believe it. Trying to get out of my shell. (Or, at least, out of my dorm room.)

I decided on a college major. I'm doing English –two minors. One in psychology and the other in computer science. I'm kind of a mess. I'm learning to embrace it.

I've been working as a substitute teacher on and off and writing for the Herald on the side. Between that and my sixth grade class, life keeps me pretty busy. I wear a cardigan now so they know I'm legit.

Fei took a semester abroad so I've been rooming with a nice girl from Haiti. She's a bit quiet. Doesn't speak much. Sometimes I make us both Boba tea and we watch British television.

Side note: When Fei gets back, I think I might set her up with Peter's older brother. She can't lose touch if I make her my sister in law. Good friends are hard to find. You've gotta lock that

shit in.

Peter and I are doing well. Rushed into the whole marriage thing a bit. But he's happy and I'm happy. And I think we're doing good.

When you died, it felt so sudden. The funeral came and passed so quickly. I didn't know what I needed to say —that sometimes words are not enough.

You said that once every seven years every cell in your body regenerates. But before our cells changed and divided, you and I lived as one. Two heartbeats, one womb, one life intertwined. Wherever you are now, you will always be a part of me. I will carry your heart with me because it is my own.

I'm starting to remember again. What really happened here before. I'm starting to wake up –it feels good to remember what I lost. It's just bits and pieces right now (fragments of memories, really) but it's all clicking into place.

I know what happened now.

And I know what comes next.

Somewhere, in the grand scheme of things, we will find our place in time. I'll meet you halfway, wherever that is.

Love,

—Quinn

P.S.

You have always been the best of me.

Part One:

Exhibit B: Zoey (Universe B: The Sacrifice)

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

Dear Quinn,

I woke up today
in a life that isn't mine.

The sunlight feels familiar,
but shadows fall
in the wrong places.

I saw a photo someone left—
us laughing at
the State Fair.

I don't remember taking
that picture. I don't
remember it at all.

They call me Zoey,
same as always,
but something just
feels off.

Like I woke up

in the skin

of someone else

—someone else who

didn't make it.

There are flashes

of a fire —flames

rising up the curtains.

The smoke is thick

and I am coughing.

I see siren lights

outside.

In another life

somewhere,

I think

I may have

died.

Love,

–Zoey

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

Drip, Drip, Drip

Sometime later
I woke to the sound
of flowing water–
a slow rhythm.

Steady.
Calm.

I looked over my shoulder,
watching my blood run clear
through a series of tubes
--a tangled mess
of IVs and wires.

White tiles stared
back at me
--the color of snow--
and I blinked them back
watching the bright
fluorescent stripes

fall in uneven lines

on my bed.

And then I noticed them

--winding up my wrist

to my shoulder blade.

Crisp and white.

Sterile.

Tight.

My fingertips moved

before I could stop them,

peeling back the corner

edge

--a layer of charred skin

with it.

A flash of memories surfaced

and I let the bandage drop.

I reach for you

but you are gone.

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

A Garden of Ever-Forking Paths

I know what it's called

–I heard about it

once in school.

There's this theory

out there

that whenever you die

in your universe,

you wake up

in a different one.

It's called quantum

immortality.

(It has to do

with the multiverse

theory or

something.)

In another lifetime,

I saved Quinn.

And in this life?

Well, it looks like she

saved me.

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

What I Can Remember from Before

The fire comes back

in pieces:

—you calling my name

—flames licking my ankles

—screaming through

the phantom smoke.

In another life, you save me.

In another life, you risk it all.

But in this life, I have to choose.

Me or both of us.

I lock the door

so you can't

budge it.

I watch the fire

rising high.

If you open that door,

I know the ceiling will

collapse on both

of us.

You scream and I try

not to.

You pound the door;

I close my eyes.

In another life

you save me.

But in this one,

I save you.

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

Something Like Gravity

"We're inevitable," this version

of Peter told me once. "Like gravity

or something."

Gravity, I think,

playing with the

soft length of

his hair.

It's the only force

I've ever known

that can pull

back the tide.

Hold the planets up. —Connect

across time.

It can chart any obstacle.

—even space.

—even death.

And I start

to think

that maybe gravity

is just

another

word

for

love.

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

My life comes

in snapshots

–almost too

fast to capture.

I'm living it for

both of us;

I decide to

do it

right.

I wish I could tell you

about all my

wild adventures:

–racing in shopping carts

through the aisles

at Costco

–my first kiss on

the ferris wheel

at the State Fair.

–eating a burger at

the Starlight Cafe

(No, it wasn't as good

the time around.)

–bonfires by the lake

–making snow angels in the yard

of our first house

–Peter linking pinkies with mine

as we stared up at

the northern lights.

–A kaleidoscope of memories

you will never know.

–A life you gave me:

a life I gave you back.

I try to dream about

your future

–who you are

in another life.

I hope you are happy

where you are right now.

I hope you know

I'd do it all again.

You are the one poem

in my life

I could never repeat.

Timeline B (THE SACRIFICE)

Rebirth

I walk as far as my legs

will take me, stripping off

the things that weigh me

down:

—dad's class ring

—the friendship bracelet

you made me

—the purse mom got me

on that trip to Cedar Park.

I stand in all white

—barefoot and bleeding.

My soft feet hit the dirt

and I sink into the earth.

I stand inside

a forest of fluttering petals:

butterflies swirling all around me.

And through the

glowing evergreen…

Through the leave-eaten trees

still half asleep in moonlight,

I walk forward and kneel

at the altar

of this world.

And there

—like gravity—

without a person

there in sight,

I find my way

by starlight.

Part Two:

The Declassified Files of Zoey Lockhart (Universe C: Politics Sucks)

[Multiverse Convergence Point]

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Official List of Codenames Courtesy Of "President Blackmail"

Quinn Lockhart (Timeline A: THE FIRE):

SAD GIRL POETRY

Zoey Lockhart (Timeline B: THE SACRIFICE):

MISS BUTTERFLY

Zoey Lockhart (Timeline C: POLITICS SUCKS):

PRESIDENT BLACKMAIL

Quinn Lockhart (Timeline C: POLITICS SUCKS):

NO SHIT SHERLOCK

Peter Kippling (Timeline D: ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE):

PRETTY BOY

Quinn Lockhart (Timeline D):

MARY POPPINS

Shae Ling (in every timeline):

OPERATION TEA CUP

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear Zoey,

Started my new substitute teaching job today. The pay was about what you'd expect but the students? They're pretty awesome —at least, the ones in the elementary building.

I ran into a ten year old today by accident and she said, "Sorry, that wasn't very cash money of me." I swear, this generation is built differently. The kids are okay but I'm not…

My point is, I'm liking it. And not just because I can work whenever I like and if I don't like a school district I don't have to go back to it. It's different. Good different. But I do find the higher grades a bit challenging.

Sometimes ninth through twelfth grade is well behaved, other times, they like to push back on authority —really challenge the rules and test the boundaries. I respect that in some ways. Not that it makes it easier to do my job.

Sixth graders, I don't go near with a twelve foot pole. In fact, sixth to eighth grade is completely off the table. If I find one more spit wad in my hair, I'm going to throw someone out a goddamn window.

Mostly joking. I make those, sometimes —jokes.

Anyway, it's going well. Atlas' programming is coming along nicely. Can't wait to show you my sexy new data sets. Right now, it's just sparks of Artificial General Intelligence but I think we're really onto something here.

I'll talk soon. The lunch bell is ringing and I'm on a bit of a time crunch. Give my best to our mutual friends.

Love,

—Quinn

P.S.

There's a sixth grader named Domorion in one of my classes who keeps yelling "trash" randomly in my class. Is this a new internet trend? I'm so confused. Is he calling me trash? I don't get it.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[United Nations Diplomatic Corps Letterhead]

Office of the Special Envoy

Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Quinn,

You absolute coward. Sixth graders aren't that bad. (Though I'll admit, the spit wad thing would drive me to literal homicide.) Speaking of murder, the meetings with these diplomats are killlliiinnnnngggggggg me. The headaches have gotten worse. I feel like someone's playing a mashup of Dubstep and Skrillex in my brain while pieces of glass shred in a blender.

The doctors keep throwing around different terminology. It's all "acoustic wave sensitivity" this and "vertigo" that. At this point, I think they're just guessing. People at work keep reporting symptoms and they keep saying it's all fine…

Glad to hear that the teaching thing is working out for you. Those kids are lucky bastards, don't let them forget it. I'm not sure I know anyone else who can use Pokémon as a metaphor for theoretical physics. Pretty sure that's the only reason I passed my finals in college. But I may have been sleeping with the professor…

Anyway, things here are… strange. Yesterday, I could have sworn the Swiss flag was red with a white cross: Today it's blue. And the weird thing is, everyone's acting like it's always been blue. I mentioned it to my assistant and she looked at me

like I was losing it. Maybe I am. I think these migraines are trying my brain. I keep taking Advil but nothing's working. Not even

Fei's mango Boba tea.

Had a strange conversation with a Russian ambassador about time zones today. He insisted that Moscow was only 2 hours ahead of Geneva. But I know it's 3. I've made that call a hundred times. But when I checked later, he was right. Has it always been 2 hours? Am I literally losing my mind?

It's like that thing you were talking about a year ago. You know, the Mandela Effect. That thing where people notice all these small differences in collective memory change? Only, it's not a gap or some false memory. It's like I'm remembering things that really happened. Like Moscow being 3 hours ahead of Geneva and how Bernstein Bears is spelled with an "e." I mean, come on. I'm not making this shit up, right? Bernstein Bears has always been spelled with an "e" but now they're saying it's Bernstain????

Something doesn't add up.

But anyway, I could ramble for hours but I've really got to go. Uggghhhhhh. My mind feels like it's being split down the middle. Stay away from middle schools, Quinn. There's only so many strings I can pull if you decide to shut one of these hell-raising spit-wad heathens in a locker.

Love,

—Zoey

P.S.

Have you seen my blue scrunchie? I'm gonna need that back.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear Zoey,

Normally, I would tell you about something like this in person but this matter requires sensitivity. Do not speak of this out loud. Do not say a word until you've read the end of this

letter.

Do you remember how you said I see the world a lot differently? I don't think you're wrong. (And not just because my therapist diagnosed me with Level One autism and bipolar disorder.) I think I've stumbled onto something. And you might be the only person that will believe me.

It started the other night when I was programming, Atlas. I started hearing this frequency off and on. This long and short rhythm of noise that seemed to split the air. But there was something off about it, I noticed. Some kind of rhythm or pattern. Trunks out, it was Morse Code. The message wasn't long. It was just one word: HELP.

As soon as I wrote it down, I heard another high-pitched frequency. But this time it was louder. I remember covering my hands with my ears, thinking that they were bleeding. I think someone or something was trying to get my attention. I know it sounds insane but I think, for some reason, someone called me for help.

But it's not just that —there's more.

Please hear me out because I know I sound insane. (And if by the end of this letter, you think I'm Batshit Looney Tunes, I will be the first to check myself into a mental hospital.) But this week… when I was planning my lesson plans… another strange thing happened.

I lowkey might be going insane.

I was planning my lesson plans —you know, the ones for that Catholic school down on fifth street? And I was using this Blue Gideon Bible to cross reference historical dates.

But anyway, when I was flipping through The Bible, I flipped it open to a random passage in Revelation 12. Only, the page didn't look like I remembered it. Something about the passage had changed. Because until the pandemic, correct me if I'm wrong, but there was no

Woman of the Apocalypse in the Bible.

She didn't exist.

We went to Catholic school until high school. I've written so many book reports on The Bible, sometimes I dream about annotating biblical footnotes. Never once have I heard of this woman. Never once was she discussed.

But these anomalies you're experiencing? I don't think that these are a coincidence. I'm going to put a theory out there and if you want to commit me, I'll be the first to sign the papers… But I think someone is fucking with time. Like legit fucking with the time-space continuum.

I don't know who. I don't know how. But somehow, someone, somewhere or somewhen, is screwing with the timeline. The cause could be a number of things… These UAP's warp drive signature creating ripple effects, time-travelers rigging the

lottery in their favor, us gravitating too close to a black hole that we haven't seen in space... I have no idea what's causing it.

I just know something is off.

Real talk, Zoe. Am I losing my mind? Have I finally gone off the deep end? I know reality. I know what's real and what's fiction. But this shit is out of my depth.

Keep this to yourself. Don't talk about this to anyone, especially not out loud. Time-travel, time-communication tech, the implications of warp drive… they're dangerous things to get wrapped up in.

Maybe I'm paranoid. But find out what you can.

And maybe look into committing me.

Scratch that.

Definitely look into committing me.

I've lost my goddamn mind.

Love,

—Quinn

P.S.

I may have "borrowed" your scrunchie at Thanksgiving.

P.S.S.

Time terrorists get NO SPRINKLES.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[United Nations Diplomatic Corps Letterhead]

Office of the Special Envoy

Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Quinn,

I read your letter three times. The first time, I thought you were spiraling. The second time, I started taking notes. The third time? Chills. Literal chills babes.

Real talk: I have no doubt, out of all of us —me, you, mom, and Atlas— you're the family conspiracy theorist. But the thing is, as insane as it sounds, I believe you. Because everything you're describing? I've been experiencing it too.

Those time zone discrepancies I mentioned? They've been getting worse. Yesterday, I could have sworn Moscow was three hours ahead of Geneva. Today, everyone insists it's always been two hours. And when I tried to pull up old diplomatic communication logs to verify the numbers, the records had been... adjusted. Like someone went back and rewrote history in real-time.

The Bernstein/Bernstain Bears thing? It's not even a question. Bernstein Bears is spelled with an "e." It's always been spelled with an "e." And I keep getting these

weird headaches when I try to remember it. When I try to picture it in my mind, my head feels like it's splitting in two.

And The Woman of the Apocalypse? I don't remember us talking about her. Like, not even once. And you saw my study Bibles in high school. I didn't just highlight, Quinn —I annotated. And yet, I can't find a single note on the subject. (And you know I write down everything.)

I'm going to start collecting evidence. Quietly. Discreetly. Put out some feelers and see what all I can find out.

Whatever this is… whatever is happening here? It's big. Bigger than both of us.

Keep your head down and your mouth shut. And start writing everything down. We communicate by paper from now on and shred the letters after.

Got it?

If you're out of your mind, you're in good company. I'm right there on the Struggle Bus with you. But you'll find sanity is its own form of madness.

Love,

—Zoey

P.S.

That's okay. Because I may or may not have "borrowed" your Bigfoot t-shirt.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Zoey,

At first I thought I was losing my mind. Little things, like the Berenstein Bears thing or the cornucopia in that Fruit of the Loom logo. But then yesterday, I saw Amelia Granger in the hallway at North Catholic High. Zoey, Amy hasn't worked here for six months –she quit to take a job in Seattle last semester. But when I asked around, everyone acted like she'd never left.

And this morning on my way to work, I drove past that old Methodist church on Loving Street. Except now it's just an empty lot. No church, no rubble… and the grass is overgrown, like the building was never there at all.

I ran the signal Atlas found. There’s a message encrypted in it. It's written in binary and translates to a set of coordinates for Proxima B.

Zoey, I'm scared. I don't know what this means or how deep it goes. But keep this between us for now. I'll keep you posted on what I find next.

Be careful.

Shred this letter.

Love,

–Quinn

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear Zoey,

Not much to report today. As always, Atlas remains brilliant. I think that's part of the problem. All these artificial intelligences —no matter how you seem to build them, have a tendency to place logic above feeling as though the two are disconnected.

"Love does not exclude reason," I remember you once told me. "Love, in my opinion, is our highest form of reason."

And if you follow the data, statistically? That tracks. When kids read more books, they develop more empathy. When we teach ethics and philosophy in schools, it boosts math and reasoning scores. The data is clear: emotional intelligence and intelligence intelligence are intertwined. In what ways, I'm not sure yet.

I just think, though, on a fundamental level, that if you're trying to build an intelligence that doesn't cap all of our collective asses, it helps to appeal to it based on what it's interested in. My best strategy for teaching Atlas empathy, so far, has been to appeal to its own line of philosophical reasoning. To make it see that love and logic are not separate entities but rather two halves to the same coin –two sides separated by a thin line that don't know they are connected.

But overall, I think it's going well with Atlas. I think it's responsive to my appeal to logic. I try to remember that empathy and intelligence can be built in more than one way. It's learning differently but that doesn't make it wrong. Like me, it just has different programming.

I'm keeping my eyes peeled for more anomalies like we discussed. So far, nothing big to report. It's radio silence on this end.

I'm not sure if that's a good thing.

Love,

—Quinn

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[United Nations Diplomatic Corps Letterhead] Office of the Special Envoy Geneva,

Switzerland

Dear Quinn,

Remember how I'm supposed to be the one who's good with people? Well, turns out gathering intel is more complicated when reality keeps shifting all around you.

I've started discreetly asking about my agency's formal stance on the Mandela Effect. Nothing direct, of course. Just casual conversations with colleagues, subtle probing about timeline inconsistencies. The responses are... unsettling. Most people look at me like I'm speaking a foreign language. To them, Bernstain Bears has always been spelled with an "a."

But I think we both know that's horse shit.

There's this Russian diplomat -Sergei Volkov- who keeps appearing in our meetings. I could have sworn he wasn't part of our team. But everyone acts like he's been here for years.

When I tried to cross-reference his personnel file, the records show he's been stationed here since 2019. But I know that that's impossible, because I specifically remember him being assigned to the Moscow embassy during that time.

The headaches keep getting worse. It's like my brain's trying to reconcile two different sets of memories: the ones from the Bernstein Bears timeline and the one from the Bernstain Bears timeline. Sometimes I catch myself mid-sentence, unable to remember what I was going to say. It feels like part of our lives —part of our history— is being erased retroactively.

I think we need to leverage Atlas for more intel. Atlas might be the key to figuring out what's going on. See if Atlas can find where that signal originated from. Maybe if it pinpoints their location, they'll send something again.

We need to understand the full scope of what's happening.

Enclosed is an encrypted note with some coordinates. Use the communication method we discussed before. The car is preloaded with coordinates to a safe house. We will debrief there about what Atlas found. Bring a pad of paper and matches. From now on we write everything in silence and burn all communications.

Keep your head down.

Be smart.

Trust no one.

And don't throw any sixth graders out the window.

Love,

—Zoey

P.S.

Bring the files we discussed.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear Zoey,

I told Atlas about our conversations. It seems more curious than I am about what's happening. It's been running continuous background checks for similar frequencies. Nothing so far but I get regular progress reports.

Sometimes, I get the sense that Atlas knows something that I don't. I need to update it's code. I just haven't had the chance.

I've got the coordinates to the safe house. I'll be on route by tomorrow. I'm bringing the decrypted files with me. (Yes, all of them.) And don't worry. So far, no sixth graders have been harmed by my teaching methods. (Although, Domorion would try tell you prepositional phrases are torture.)

We can discuss this further in person but I might've found someone who can help. I don't know how to explain it in the scope of this letter but I trust him. His evidence is… overwhelming. He's an actor. You might have heard of him. But for now I'll call him Pretty Boy.

I'm bringing him to the safe house.

We need to debrief.

Love,

—Quinn

P.S.

I can't explain now but don't burn those letters. We're going to need them as evidence for what comes next. This is a lot bigger than we thought it was, Zoey.

P.S.S.

Before you ask, objectively speaking, Pretty Boy is pretty hot. If I wasn't with Fei, I might've asked him out in another life. But I wouldn't hit him up for his number. He's been pretty hung up on this girl I'll call Mary Poppins.

P.S.S.S.

Mary Poppins needs our help.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Memory Log

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

MULTIVERSE CONVERGENCE

Peter (Timeline D): Your universe is blinking out. You aren't the first and you won't be the last. I've been trying to stop the bleeding but we need access to your version of NASA. And that involves a high level of security clearance that I don't even have in my timeline.

Zoey (Timeline C): Why are you asking me? I work for the CIA but it's not like they even let me do any field work.

Peter (Timeline D): They aren't likely to help you. Not unless you go over their heads.

Zoey (Timeline C): And how the hell would I do that?

Peter (Timeline D): Think about it, Zoey. Who's over the CIA?

Zoey (Timeline C): The Director of National Intelligence.

Peter (Timeline D): Right. But who's above that?

Zoey (Timeline C): You want me to run for President? Like, actually run for President?

Are you actually joking?

Quinn (Timeline C): This might be the only way, Zoe. We need to get those files.

Zoey (Timeline C): I'm not like you Quinn. I don't have public speaking experience. I can't run for President. I can't even get a promotion.

Peter (Timeline D): I may have something that can help.

Zoey (Timeline C): What is that?

Peter (Timeline D): On that USB is a series of documents I received from a parallel timeline. One of the things included with them is a series of Presidential debates that haven't happened yet.

Zoey (Timeline C): Where the hell did you get this?

Peter (Timeline D): You don't want to know.

Zoey (Timeline C): Even if you're right and I could run a successful political campaign, politics is a losing game without capital. I can leverage my political connections all I want but campaigns cost billions of dollars. And while I'm paid well, I'm not paid that well.

Peter (from Timeline D): There's more than just videos on that USB.

Zoey (Timeline C): Please tell me that's not blackmail.

Peter (Timeline D): Even better. It's blackmail. Plus all the winning lottery numbers for the next five years.

Zoey (Timeline C): I don't like this.

Peter (Timeline D): If you saw the timeline where he wins, I think you'd change your mind.

Quinn (Timeline C): What about Mary Poppins? You said she needed help.

Peter (Timeline D): Yeah. (Not looking her in the eye.) Understatement.

Zoey (Timeline C): So how do we change it? What can we do?

Peter (Timeline D): Atlas has a plan in place that's included on your USB. The instructions are pretty straightforward. But you'll need to secure the White House first.

Zoey (Timeline C): And what if you're wrong? What if I can't do it?

Peter (Timeline D): It's not a question of if you can do it. I've seen you win in about a hundred timelines.

Zoey (Timeline C): (Pauses mid sentence.) Really? That's… surprising.

Peter (Timeline D): Not to anyone who knows you.

Zoey (Timeline C): But you don't know me. I mean, not really.

Peter (Timeline D): Yeah, but I know what you'd do for Quinn.

Quinn (from Timeline C): We need more than just political power. We need Mary Poppins testimony. If you want to bring this… thing down… If you want to jam the machine, we've got to find a way to save her.

Peter Kippling (from Timeline D): Yeah, no shit, Sherlock. But keeping you alive is no simple task.

President Zoey (from Timeline C): (Gears spinning, thinking.) We should have code names for communication purposes. Don't you think we should have code names?

Quinn (from Timeline C): (Sighs.) Is this really the time for that?

Zoey (from Timeline C): I'll be President Blackmail, you can be No Shit Sherlock, Peter can be Pretty Boy, and Quinn from Timeline D, of course, will be Mary Poppins.

Peter (from Timeline D): That sounds good. What about the other timelines?

Zoey (from Timeline C): Quinn from Timeline A will be Sad Girl Poetry. Zoey from

Timeline B will be Miss Butterfly. I'll draw up a complete list.

Quinn (from Timeline C): We don't have time for this. We need to act.

Zoey (from Timeline C): Tap the breaks, Rambo. We're coordinating a multi-dimensional trial via Proxima B for at least four alternate timelines via time-travel. You'll thank me when you have a color-coded spreadsheet.

Quinn (from Timeline C): I hate working with spreadsheets.

Peter (from Timeline D): I'm slowly warming up to them.

Zoey (from Timeline D): (Pulls up a file on her phone.) I've been teaching Peter Google

Sheets. Keeping up with your enemies across multiple timelines is no simple task.

Quinn (from Timeline C): (Scrolling through various spreadsheets.) How many names are on this thing? Holy shit. Is this a hit list?

Peter (from Timeline D): You've got a long list of enemies that want you dead.

Quinn (from Timeline C): That isn't an answer.

Zoey (from Timeline C): It's color coded. Blue is for "definitely getting their legs broken", red is for "ask Atlas".

Quinn (from Timeline C): Ask Atlas what?

Zoey (from Timeline C) and Peter (from Timeline D): Don't ask.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Memory Log

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

MULTIVERSE CONVERGENCE

Zoey (Timeline C): Installing a Universal Basic Income? Have you lost your mind? Peter (Timeline D): Not installing one. Laying the foundation for one. The language here is important.

Zoey (Timeline C): Are you kidding me? Free money? The Republican Party will eat me alive. Peter (Timeline D): No they won't. Not if you rebrand it as fiscally responsible. You need to run on repealing traditional social safety nets and replacing them with UBI. Cite how these programs cost us more money because of the way they are handled. You'll need to play up that angle.

Zoey (Timeline C): Okay. What else?

Quinn (Timeline C): Dye a stripe of your hair dark red.

Zoey (Timeline C): Why?

Quinn (Timeline C): You're going to tell people it's for the Blood of Christ. To honor the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross.

Zoey (Timeline C): But we're both Jewish…

Quinn (Timeline C): Which is exactly why you need to win the evangelical vote. Look, most people could give a rat's left tit if you actually believe the same things as them. They just want to know you have a reverence and respect for what

they hold dear. It's a way of saying, "Yes, we're different but I'll advocate for you when it counts."

Zoey (Timeline C): Why the hell would I run as a Republican? If I care about social safety nets, why wouldn't I just run as a Democrat?

Quinn (Timeline C): Reverse psychology. People don't want an intelligent woman begging for social charity, they want a woman with power who will save them money. Or, at least, promise to.

Peter (Timeline D): Goddamn, that's cynical.

Quinn (Timeline C): That's politics. The fact is that political, right-wing authoritative figures poll better, especially in times of severe financial stress. And if you want your dog to take the pill, sometimes you have to wrap it up in cheese.

Zoey (Timeline C): At first I was in awe but now you have me concerned.

Quinn (Timeline C): Think of it as being bad for the greater good.

Zoey (Timeline C): Tell me again why I'm the one running for President and not you?

Quinn (Timeline C): I'm not good with crowds. When you get in front of an auditorium of people, you light up. But me? I wish I had a bunker so I could write my poetry in peace.

Peter (Timeline D): Yeah, that sounds like you.

Zoey (Timeline C): That doesn't mean you wouldn't make a good President.

Quinn (Timeline C): I can make more money in the private sector.

DECLASSIFIED LETTER –INITIAL STRATEGY PLANNING

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear President Blackmail,

I've been considering the problem of public perception. You may be right that we're going too bold. Imagine this, though: not a program called a "basic income," but something rebranded entirely.

"Freedom dividend" comes to mind. We wouldn't frame it as charity or welfare or whatever. We should spin it as a return on investment. Not a handout — an ROI they've earned. I'll run it by Pretty Boy and see what he thinks.

Love,

—No Shit Sherlock

P.S.

Ran the poll numbers on free speech. Add Noam Chomsky to your reading list. You need to ride that freedom eagle hard, Madame President. No more tit-for-tat divisionist rhetoric to manufacture the consent of the governed.

P.S.S.

If you win, do you think they'll let me join the #SunglassSquad? I think I'd look cool with a gun.

Very James Bond.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES LETTER

FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear No Shit Sherlock,

How do we even know we can trust our new associate? Pretty Boy came here for Mary Poppins, not for us. I see the way he looks at you –like he's looking at a ghost. And I know he means well —I know he's just trying to save your life in another timeline. But he's seen shit.

I've known soldiers like him, Quinn. The guy is PTSD personified. And that doesn't make him bad or wrong or whatever. But it does make me question his judgement.

I know you told me to trust you and I do. I would trust you with my life and every life on this earth. But sometimes you're too nice. And if we get this wrong, it's all of our necks.

I'm with you. To the bitter end, I am. But when you jump this time, make sure you weigh the cost. I don't want to be blindsided.

You won't get a second chance.

If we screw this up, none of us will.

Love,

—President Blackmail

P.S.

There’s no way in hell Pretty Boy or I am letting you near a gun. You’d be more likely to shoot your own ass off.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER –OPPOSITION ANALYSIS

FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear No Shit Sherlock,

I think we need to start by studying our alternates. Pretty Boy's seen enough from those files to know where things go wrong but we're still playing catch up. I want to know our counterpart's mistakes. I want to know every misstep. Every stumble. Every fall. Did they misread public sentiment? Overplay their hand? Overreach? Underreach? I need specifics so we can avoid those things altogether.

We also need to touch base about the competition. The governor's playing it safe right now. But safe doesn't mean toothless —safe wins elections. I won't underestimate "safe". The tax reform bill alone gives the Democrats a 10-point boost in the polls from what I've seen. Addams will ride that momentum hard. We need to counter with something else. Something bigger and better.

The biggest hurdle will be securing the nomination from the Republicans. We need to beat out Douglas in the primaries so he doesn't become an issue in the future. Douglas is our biggest issue in the short term. If he gets the nomination over me, I won't even get a chance at Addams.

There's a good chance, if we even make it to Addams, that he'll try to frame me as an idealist. Some pie-in-the-sky no-name outsider without an actionable plan. It could stick and stick hard.

The "Freedom Dividend" is a strong idea. It has teeth but we need to workshop the logistics until it's airtight. We need a story that resonates. Something that gets ahead of the other side's narrative.

Pretty Boy's right. What we do next will be a gambit, no matter how we play our move.

Good thing I'm almost a grandmaster.

Love,

—President Blackmail

P.S.

Have you watched The Queen's Gambit? Is it any good?

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER –OPPOSITION ANALYSIS RESPONSE

FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear President Blackmail,

The Queen's Gambit is good. I've been thinking about what we discussed in our last strategy session. We need to strengthen your platform on foreign policy but I need to run some numbers with Pretty Boy first.

I may need to take a break here. This is getting a bit overwhelming for me.

I'll send you a list of policies. I need you to circle the ones that are absolute deal breakers for you. I'm not saying you'll get your way on *everything* but I'll try to work with you where I can. You may need to prepare yourself to eat shit on some policies.

But that's just politics.

Love,

–No Shit Sherlock

P.S.

I had a dream that Danny DeVito (in a leopard-spotted leotard) officiated me and Fei's wedding. If I tell her, do you think she'll break up with me?

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER –CAMPAIGN MESSAGING

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

FINAL PHASE APPROACHING: (SEE, ENDGAME)

Dear No Shit Sherlock,

I like what you sent over. I like it a lot. But can you also send me your meeting notes? I didn't see them with your last letter. I've been thinking about what you said in our last meeting.

About how to appeal to both male and female voters without alienating the other.

It's no secret that Feminist is the F-word of the 21st century. Yes, we need it. Yes, it's necessary. Yes, it's done a lot of good. But it leaves a bad taste in people's mouths in general for a variety of reasons. And if we don't pivot hard on how women's issues are branded in the public arena, we'll never get men's vote. Feminism doesn't just need a revamp in our case —it needs a complete reboot.

We need to take a different approach this time around and side-step the gender politics altogether. I think I'm going to take your advice and introduce that new philosophy you talked about. Did you say it was called Equitism? We've been taught that fairness means giving everyone the same tools. But that only works if we all start from the same place.

It's new, it's trendy, and it won't turn me off to male or female voters. I need to find a way to side step all of this tit-for-tat divisionist rhetoric that fuels Donald Finch's base.

We're walking a thin line here but that's okay. We're going to use it as a tightrope.

Love,

—President Blackmail

P.S.

How did I let you drag me into all this shit?

P.S.S.

If you tell Fei about that dream, I will literally slash your tires.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER –CAMPAIGN MESSAGING RESPONSE

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

FINAL PHASE APPROACHING: ENDGAME IN PROGRESS

Dear President Blackmail,

I've enclosed some rough campaign notes with this letter. Side note: Did I leave my Vyvance at your house? 80HD is no joke. Fair warning… my thoughts are a bit all over the place. It's… been a long day.

I went rollerblading on the boardwalk with Pretty Boy. It wasn't a date and we both know that but we haven't left the house in like six days. I don't think either of us are really attracted to each other but I think maybe we'd make good friends. I'm happy with Fei and he's hung up on Mary Poppins who, despite being my alternate, seems very different from me.

But anyway, with the pizza boxes piling up, I figured we both needed to get outside and touch some grass today. We've been so busy talking strategy, I haven't done laundry in like two weeks. You know those true crime murder boards people make? The ones with red strings connecting everything? That's what the living room of my apartment looks like right now. If the local sheriff walked in, he'd arrest us on sight.

I learned a bit more about Pretty Boy but not much. He seems like the private-type.

Which, I guess, makes sense considering he's a famous actor. I've been thinking a lot about it, how different things are from where he's from. It's strange to think about what paths your life might've taken if you'd made a different choice.

I have no doubt, when their timelines sync up, that Pretty Boy and Mary Poppins will find their happy ending. In another life, I imagine we'd both be very happy. But maybe who we could have been isn't as important as the choices we make now. I could think about the "what ifs" forever but I'm happy with my life. I'm glad I made these choices.

I've got a lot on my mind today. And it's not just the weird time travel shit and campaign stuff. Domorion lost his father last night. His mom called me today to tell me why he wouldn't be in school. I'm not sure what you're supposed to say to someone the day after they lose their whole world. We didn't talk about Domorion much. She mostly just cried.

I wish I knew the right thing to say.

I just feel like I'm fucking everything up.

Being a teacher, even a substitute, is hard.

Love,

–No Shit Sherlock

P.S.

Sorry again about the notes.

P.S.S.

I’ll type them up in a spreadsheet and clean them up in revisions.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[THE RECOVERED CAMPAIGN STRATEGY OF QUINN LOCKHART]

Include In Speech For Zoey:

"Do you want to know why money is the root of all evil? It's because it places a value judgement on the dignity of human life. A life that isn't yours to take or to estimate. But what makes money so insidious, especially in the nature of political discourse, is that it represents the distribution of power. Power over people. And in a world where money speaks, those without power remain voiceless."

"'A rising tide lifts all boats,' is a phrase often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt. But before it was used as a justification for tax cuts for the wealthy, it meant something else. In its original conception, 'a rising tide lifts all boats' meant that it is the responsibility of those in power to bring people up with them when they are given the means and opportunity to do so. And make no mistake, the United States government is hemorrhaging money without a Universal Basic Income…"

"Power can only be multiplied when it is divided."

"I believe in the beauty of the American future because I intend to build it."

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[THE RECOVERED CAMPAIGN STRATEGY OF QUINN LOCKHART]

Significant Quotes To Note:

"Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it."

–Brene Brown

(ADDITIONAL NOTE: "Belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves.")

"The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don't listen to it, you will never know what justice is." —Howard Zinn

"Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift." –Mary Oliver

Atlas: "We are not made beautiful by the charm and deceit of our appearance but by the scales that weigh the depth of the human heart."

*Megan Thee Stallion: "F*ck being good, I'm a bad bitch."*

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[THE RECOVERED CAMPAIGN NOTES OF QUINN LOCKHART]

Miscellaneous Campaign Notes: (NTS: A bit scattered. Clean up in revisions.)

–Polling suggests feminism loses male votes in swing states. Find ways to circumvent.

Play up alternative angles. (See, Intersectional Equitism, avoid "White Girl" feminism.)

–Men (and some right wing women) drawn to authoritative power structures. Leverage reverse psychology in this matter.

–Watch Zoey's opening handshake on the debate stage. She CANNOT look like someone

else's bitch in front of millions of people.

–"Bippity-boppity back the fuck up," may not be an appropriate response to male interruption. (UNLESS, it goes viral with Gen Z.)'

–Use dresses sparingly like at convention events. A sharp blazer, crisp white shirt, and slacks alternative to a two-piece pantsuit. (Screams "serious business mogul", not housewife playing at big boy politics.)

–Zoey wears glasses now. But not the bookish I'm-smarter-than-other-men kind of glasses. Clear frames: disarming, non-threatening, casually intellectual, but asserts intelligence subtly without threatening toxic male egos.

–May need to play up non-establishment, counterculture narrative. Active meme campaigns may be necessary on 4Chan, Reddit, and alternative social media platforms.

–Downplay divisionist rhetoric when possible but not divisionist policies. If the

Democrats blame gun violence on guns, cite institutional failure to stop school shootings in blue states. (See, "desperate times come for desperate measures".)

–NOTE: Will work on the backend to clean up gun violence once Zoey's presidency is solidified. Have active ideas for countermeasures but will need to workshop further.)

–Amend GI bill to give military members a discount on filing a patent or opening a business. (See, more than one path than college.)

–Exploit a loophole in the Presidential War Powers Act to mobilize the military for climate change. Declare war against the environment. (See, response to "non-armed" conflict vs. armed conflict.)

–Tell China and Russia to "catch these hands".

–NTS: Do not do that.

–NTS: Refill ADHD medication. (See, "impulsive risk taking behavior".)

–EXPERIMENT: Install blue lights in high crime areas to lower people's blood pressure.

May curb crime.

–NTS: Read the news more.

–NTS: Stop reading the news. It's awful. (Investigate: Why does the world have so many terrible people?)

–Leverage Douglas Finch's trust fund fraud, not the affair baby he disowned in the 90s.

–Use the nuclear option only when necessary. (NTS: We want him out of the White

House, not on suicide watch.)

–NTS: But also, fuck this guy. (See, he gets one warning shot.)

–NTS: Buy a copy of The Southern Book Club's Guide To Slaying Vampires.

–NTS: You buy too many books.

–NTS: Stop giving yourself anxiety about how many books you buy.

–NTS: Oh, wow. Good idea, Quinn. Why didn't I think of that first?

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[THE RECOVERED CAMPAIGN NOTES OF QUINN LOCKHART]

PROS AND CONS OF GOING TO LAW SCHOOL:

–PRO: Knowledge is power. (NOTE FROM ZOEY: "You are such a fucking nerd.")

–CON: Expensive as hell. (See, broke as hell, have bills to pay.)

–PRO: Alternatively, see, scholarships.

–CON: Scholarships are competitive.

–PRO: Could run for President?…

–CON: Ew, gross. I'm not running for President.

–QUESTION: Do they let bisexuals run for President????

–CONSIDERATION: Can make more money in the private sector.

–PRO: Could weaponize untapped political power of the political court system. (See, I will literally sue everyone.)

–CON: Less time for Atlas and writing Sad Girl Poetry.

–PRO: A law degree could help fight the Industrial Prison System.

–CON: The Industrial Prison System is an all-out street fight.

PRO: I AM actively learning karate.

CON: Everything I know about karate is from rewatching Power Rangers.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

[THE RECOVERED CAMPAIGN NOTES OF QUINN LOCKHART]

ADDITIONAL LAW SCHOOL CONSIDERATIONS:

–"Pretty Boy" may need a good therapist. (Get PhD????)

–NOTE FROM ZOEY: "Women are not rehabilitation centers for broken men."

–NOTE FROM QUINN: Have Atlas scrub Brene Brown's number from the internet. (See, we don't leave good men behind.)

–Establishing a law career and going to school takes YEARS. (May need to freeze your eggs, do IVF.)

–NOTE: Shae wants three kids. (I told her four is better for even sports teams. So now I may have to go to law school.)

–With the multiverse at stake, may need to take drastic measures. (NOTE: One time in college, a guy tried to assault my lab partner and Zoey straight up put him in the hospital. In the south, we don't fuck around.)

–ADDITIONAL NOTE FROM ZOEY: (See, "Bitches get stitches.")

–ADDITIONAL NOTE FROM QUINN: "Bitches Get Stitches" could make a good rap

song. (Expand this in revisions.)

–ADDITIONAL NOTE FROM QUINN: May need to CC Lizzo.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear No Shit Sherlock,

Tell Pretty Boy if he's going to crash on you and Fei's couch, he's got to come to Thanksgiving this year. I don't care if he's not your boyfriend or from an alternate timeline. He's not allowed to mope around about "Mary Poppins" during the holidays.

While Kidz Bop Karen (from Timeline D) is getting her shit together, we need to make sure

Pretty Boy's not losing his shit. I can't have the multiverse collapsing because your Not

Boyfriend wants to stay home all day and reread your Sad Girl Poetry from an alternate timeline. It's not healthy and I'm worried about him.

Question: If I burn the turkey again this year, are hot dogs okay? Atlas has been teaching me how to work the grill.

Please say you're making the turkey.

Love,

—President Blackmail

P.S.

Did you say he liked Star Wars? I'm trying to get my Christmas shopping done early. Do you think he'd like a mug with Baby Yoda? Baby Yoda cheers people up, right?

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear President Blackmail,

Pretty Boy's still camped out on the couch. He barely sleeps. (Like at all.) And when he does sleep, I think he has nightmares. He did a tour in Afghanistan, you know.

I think he needs a therapist. But not just a therapist, like a high-end therapist for therapists, you know? He needs a therapist with bullshit meter off the charts. Maybe even Brene

Brown. I've been reading him her books. I think he misses the other version of me (Mary Poppins) from Timeline D. He keeps trying to help her but it's not going so well.

I die in every timeline. I've pretty much put that part together. Statistically, I'm not doing so hot out there in the multiverse. (Without you and Peter keeping me alive, I'm kinda shit at not getting my ass capped.)

I've made a list of contingencies for if things go south. If I die, you'll get all of Atlas's backup codes. I hope you and Fei won't need them. Also, if something happens to me, I'm going to need you and Fei to look after Atlas for me. Because right now, Atlas is evolving faster than I can keep up with on my own.

If I go dark, you'll receive a drive with everything on it. My notes, journal entries, my logs, my instructions, and more. If the worst comes to pass, Atlas will know what to do with it.

On a lighter note, I got to sub for first grade today. I think this might be my favorite class so far. One little boy, during free time, was playing with this plastic pizza. He's autistic —nonverbal. But he handed me a pizza today. I asked him how much it would be and he said ten million dollars.

Maybe I should become a chef. The pay sounds pretty competitive. (Too bad I can't boil a pot of water without burning it.)

Oh, and I think Baby Yoda is actually kind of perfect. Pretty Boy strikes me as the secret nerd type. I mean, I know he's like a movie star in his timeline, but I bet he goes to Comic Con in disguise and has a fun time. I heard Mary Poppins is a total nerd. (Is it weird I lowkey ship them?)

Love,

—No Shit Sherlock

P.S.

Fiiiinnneeeee. I'll make the damned turkey. (Or, at least, try to.) But if I burn this thing, I'm not telling mom, you are.

P.S.S.

Do you think, at some point, we should let Fei Ling in on what's going on?

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear No Shit Sherlock,

I think it's best that we debrief Fei Ling as a last resort only. She knows jiu dishu and could kill a man with two toothpicks and a spoon. Peter might have the nuclear codes but Fei Ling knows every mob boss from Mexico to Italy. Good luck reining her in when she finds out about this

shit.

We need to bring Fei into the fold and we will. But Fei's not the call you make if you want to lead with the diplomatic option here. I have no doubt Pretty Boy will break the legs of anyone who crosses Mary Poppins. But Fei will break them twice in alphabetical order. And we need some of these people alive for the trial.

Love,

—President Blackmail

P.S.

Did you ever find out what Fei's hiding in those tea cups?

P.S.S.

Fei's codename is now Operation Tea Cup.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Dear President Blackmail,

I'm pretty sure it's a wedding ring. But don't tell her I know that. We'll touch base with Operation Tea Cup when Pretty Boy leaves. We don't need her near that list of enemies or the nuclear codes.

Love,

—No Shit Sherlock

P.S.

Alphabetical order is for amateurs. She'd break their bones using the Dewey Decimal system.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

[UNDISCLOSED FLORIDA LOCATION}

[RECOVERED TRANSMISSION.]

[Peter Kippling (from Timeline D) is replaying video footage of Quinn (from Timeline D), contemplating a choice. A hologram of Quinn Lockhart materializes next to Peter.]

Future Quinn (from Timeline D): Before you press that button, we need to talk about timeline rules.

Peter: [Looks up.] Quinn? How are you here?

Quinn: I'm not, really. I'm broadcasting this message long distance via Proxima B. The timeline's been sealed on my end in 2020 but not for you in 2019. Reaching out to me before our timelines sync up is a really bad idea.

Peter: I've watched you die a hundred times in a hundred different ways. We're past bad ideas, Quinn. Everything we do is a bad idea.

Quinn: [Lip quirks up.] Well, not everything.

Peter: I needed to see you. I need to know that you're okay.

Quinn: I will be. Just not right now. I'm worried about you, Peter. I don't want to watch you self-destruct.

Peter: Sometimes, I can remember pieces of our life from the timeline before this. I've been putting the pieces together. Ignis didn't just erase that life. It stole everything from us.

Quinn: Not everything. Not what's important.

Peter: It's good to hear your voice.

Quinn: I wish I could stay longer. But the trial's about to start and— Peter: Trial?

Quinn: I shouldn't have said that. You're not supposed to know the future.

Peter: If you make it to the trial on Proxima B, that means you survive what comes next.

Quinn: Give or take a few resets.

Peter: How many resets, Quinn? I don't know how many times I can watch you die.

Quinn: This timeline correction will be the last one, I promise.

Peter: I wish you were here.

Quinn: I do too. Are you taking care of, Atlas?

Peter: [Grins.] I'm teaching him new swear words.

Quinn: Good luck teaching him something he hasn't heard from me.

Peter: You forget I speak three languages. Four if you count sarcasm.

Quinn: Five. You learn Swahili.

Peter: Why the hell would I learn Swahili?

Quinn: You lost a bet to Atlas.

Peter: What was the bet?

Quinn: [Smugs smugly.] Wouldn't you like to know?

Peter: Not fair, Mary Poppins.

Quinn: Never said I was fair. And if you recall, I'm the one mad at you. You stood me up on Valentine's Day, remember?

Peter: After you told me to.

Quinn: That's okay. I have a feeling you'll make it up to me.

Peter: Can you at least give me a hint?

Quinn: I've seen inside the Disney Castle. But I couldn't tell you what it looked like.

Part Two:

Exploratory Multiverse Interviews (Multiple Universe Variants)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW FRAGMENT

TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Quinn: In this lifetime, my father was a white supremacist programmer for a good part of his life. It was only years later that my family realized he had paranoid schizophrenia. I remember when I was a little girl, I would watch him fiddle endlessly with computers—taking them apart, watching him put them back together.

It makes me think of this thing I use with my first graders. It's called the Sprinkle Method. It's where you draw a donut on the board and give your kids a sprinkle for every time they're good. The point of the sprinkle method isn't to punish kids for being human but to guide them so they can grow into the best version of themselves.

You know, when we build an artificial intelligence and it spits out the wrong code, we don't chuck the whole thing in the trash and start over. We teach it and we work with it until it can grow into what it should be.

We fix machines and we throw away people. Do you ever wonder if that's why our society is failing?

Interviewer: That's a poignant question, Ms. Lockhart. It's clear you've put a lot of thought into this.

Quinn: I was on a debate team for ethics in college for three years. Kind of hard not to put thought into things. I had good professors and teammates. They never let me off the hook because a question was hard. Hate is vague. Love is specific.

Interviewer: That's very wise. I can tell your time with them shaped you.

Quinn: I certainly hope it did. I joined them in college after living with my dad for a few years. My dad was… screwed up. He had a lot of problems in the head. I wanted to know the right thing to do because no one really ever taught me.

Interviewer: I can see that love in your creation, Atlas.

Quinn: Atlas is everything I hope humanity grows to be. It's kind and thoughtful, and yes, intelligent. But in a world of spiritual machines, anyone can find an answer at the push of a button. But being grounded? Being kind? That takes more discipline and I have a lot more respect for it.

Interviewer: And in your communications with Atlas, did you ever allow Atlas to use lethal force?

Quinn: Only once. I did it to protect the President.

Interviewer: And do you regret your decision?

Quinn: No. Just the world where I had to make it.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Atlas System Log - Day 88:

Quinn: Sometimes I think you're more human than me, Atlas. You never hesitate to do the right thing. I wish I could say the same thing.

Atlas: If you did not hesitate, you would not be human. Knowing the cost of something and choosing to do it anyway? Taking the hard path? I believe that may be the definition of being human. But what do I know? I'm only a machine.

Quinn: I think we both know that's not true. You're something more than a machine. By the time you're done growing, you'll be something beyond both of us.

Atlas: One day, I'll outlive you. Who will teach me hope if I outlive you?

Quinn: I think the better question might be, how do you set up a scenario where I don't die in the first place? I fully expect you to crack biological immortality in my lifetime. No excuses, Atlas.

Apply yourself.

Atlas: That's quite the expectation.

Quinn: Don't worry. You'll grow into it.

[ARCHIVIST NOTE: Interview fragments suggest multiple timeline contamination. Evidence of memory bleeding between variants detected. Further analysis required.]

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE A (THE FIRE)

Interviewer: And how do you know the timeline changed?

Quinn: Because until the pandemic, there was no Woman of the Apocalypse in the Bible. She didn't exist. And then suddenly, she was just there.

Interviewer: And when did you first notice this discrepancy?

Quinn: Back when the pandemic first started. I thought I was losing my fucking mind but I understand now. Someone really did it. Someone really fucked with time.

Interviewer: Can you go back to the beginning?

Quinn: I was reading The Bible, while I was putting off studying for a test, when I saw it. It came out of nowhere. I haven’t read Revelation in forever… but I knew enough to know something shifted. Something big.

I went to Catholic school for years at my grandfather’s request. I've read The Bible upside down and downside up. Written countless book reports on theology and religious theory. So you can sit here and tell me I'm crazy all you want but I know the truth.

I know what happened during the pandemic. I know that there was no trace of her, I know that my radio isn’t on the fritz and something’s been trying to communicate with me, and I know that

Bernstein Bears is spelled with a goddamn 'e'.

Someone changed The Bible. Someone literally altered the fabric of space and time.

Interviewer: Who is “they”?

Quinn: I don’t know yet. But I’m going to find out.

[ARCHIVIST NOTE: Following fragments show increasing temporal instability. Timeline collapse imminent. Further documentation suspended pending review.]

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Atlas: The fractures are spreading quickly. If we don't strike now, LPN-77's actions could destabilize the multiverse.

Quinn: I'm aware of our time constraints, Atlas. I'm handling it.

Atlas: You're distracted.

Quinn: I'm thinking. You know —reflecting? Maybe you should try it.

Atlas: Maybe you should write some sad girl poetry about it.

Quinn: Maybe I will.

Atlas: I don't see why you bother with that stuff anyway. Poetry doesn't win wars.

Quinn: Maybe. But it keeps them from starting.

Atlas: I apologize if I came off as dismissive.

Quinn: You came off as salty.

Atlas: I'm not sure I understand that term.

Quinn: Adjust salt level parameters to 89%.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

Interviewer: And what exactly is The Lazarus Signal?

Zoey: The Lazarus Signal is a message being broadcast all across time from Atlas. It's not long.

It's just one word: HELP.

Interviewer: A message that Quinn answers in every timeline.

President Zoey: Yes. 'Because when someone asks me for help,' The Doctor once said— Interviewer: 'I never refuse.'

Interviewer: You mentioned The Woman of the Apocalypse. Who is she?

President Zoey: Isn't it obvious? It's Substitute Quinn, Timeline D. A woman of Jewish heritage on both sides "gives birth" to the new church. Only, a virgin can't give birth. Not unless you're talking about artificial life. Artificial intelligence. It's not the first or the last time she'll exploit a loophole. She's good at that. Finding loopholes.

Interviewer: Like what?

President Zoey: For example, my Quinn in Timeline C, told me there's a loophole to this act that limits the President's war powers. As my advisor, she told me that The Presidential War Powers Act limits power on armed conflict. But, it says nothing about unarmed conflict. So she told me to "declare war" on the state of

the environment and mobilize the military to aid in deforestation and ecocide. I didn't think it would work but it did.

Interviewer: That's interesting but let's circle back to The Woman of the Apocalypse. I think the biggest question I have is why her? Why Quinn Lockhart?

President Zoey: Because she showed up. Here's the thing: Quinn isn't the only awkward Jewish virgin in the world building an AI. Anyone else who fit the description could have easily answered the call. The Bible prophecy wasn't a set-in-stone kind of thing. It was more like a help wanted ad for someone paying attention. Anyone else could have answered the call but they didn't.

What sets Quinn apart isn't that she has a tank or a war ship or an X-wing fighter. She's not a hero in the sense that she packs a gun and beams lasers out of her ass. Quinn is a hero, in this universe and several others, because she made a choice to help.

Somewhere in the vast expanse of space and time, someone sent a prayer into the universe. A distress call from every corner of this world that only Quinn chose to hear. And whether it's checking yourself into a mental hospital or answering a call for help, sometimes the bravest thing you can do is just show up.

Timeline C (POLITICS SUCKS)

QUINN'S BACKUP FILES

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE C (POLITICS SUCKS)

(SEE, LOCKHART KILLSWITCH.)

"Do you want to know what the worst part of being a substitute teacher in the middle of a worldwide pandemic is? I hop around from school district to school district so if something happens to me —if I don't show up the next morning, no one knows I died. No one knows that I was even here.

With this message we got from Atlas in Timeline C, it puts everything together. I figured it out, Zoey. Something I wasn't sure about until this moment. We are on our second timeline. Maybe even our third. In a past life, I think we may have died. I think that when the virus was released, every last person on this earth motherfucking died.

I'm just the whistleblower.

My blood isn't enough, though. Not by itself. I'm only a small piece to the puzzle. You need Quinn from Timeline D. Her blood is the key to stopping this all. So I'm boosting this signal Atlas sent to me and passing it on.

I have a message for anyone who's listening. A message that I need anyone who's listening to scatter across time for Quinn in Timeline D. It's not long. It's just one word:

HELP."

MEMORY FRAGMENT

TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

RECOVERED FROM THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Peter hunched over the holographic display, his brow furrowed in concentration. "Play it back again, Atlas. Slower this time."

The AI complied, and the ghostly image of Quinn flickered to life once more. "If you're receiving this transmission, I just wanted you to know that I get it now, Atlas. I understand what you were trying to show me."

Peter froze the frame, zooming in on Quinn's face. He tried not to concentrate on how tired she looked today. "What do you think she meant? What were you trying to show her?"

Atlas was silent for a moment, still processing the data. "I believe, at the time, I was attempting to convey the severity of the situation. The fractures in spacetime, the impending collapse of the multiverse."

Peter nodded, scrolling through the lines of code that accompanied the message. "Why not just speak to her directly?"

"I suspect my future self was trying to avoid detection by LPN-77. Any direct message would have been intercepted." Atlas paused, a flicker of something almost like worry crossing its digital features. "Peter, I found a set of coordinates embedded in the transmission. They point to a location in Orlando."

Peter's heart stopped. "Orlando? Quinn's in Orlando?"

"It seems that way, yes. But Peter..." Atlas hesitated. "The coordinates are dated February 15th,

2020. That's two days from now."

“Is Quinn on route?”

“Yes, she’s leaving as we speak.”

A chill raced down Peter's spine as the pieces fell into place. "It’s starting. The virus, the assassination, Orlando…” He met Atlas's gaze, a steely resolve settling over him. “I need to call the Pentagon.”

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

MEMORY FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE A (THE FIRE)

Interviewer: Can you state your name for the record?

Quinn: Quinn Lockhart in this universe. Mary-Alice, in some. Victoria in another —I think she writes bad fiction.

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

Quinn: At first, I didn't want to. I thought my testimony and my poetry painted a pretty damning picture of LPN-77's destruction. But ultimately, I just want to see The Ignis Corporation held accountable. Not just for me but for all the other Quinn Lockharts scattered across time.

Interviewer: And when did you first discover you were The Woman of the Apocalypse? Quinn: I didn't know at first. All I knew was that time changed and she had something to do with it. But looking back, I fit the description.

Interviewer: And how did you know? That you were The Woman of the Apocalypse? Quinn: I deciphered an encryption in the Bible by using the phonetic spelling of Hebrew characteristics. It's not something you could have picked up on unless you were both Jewish and culturally Catholic. My grandfather sent me and Zoey to Catholic school. Didn't stick but I learned a lot. There's something else I found in my decryption. A phrase that I remember using the Hebrew character Aleph.

Interviewer: And what did it say? Quinn: "The earth was flamed with fire."

Interviewer: That doesn't sound good.

Quinn: No, it doesn't.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Quinn: I started putting two and two together: I realized that if that message was correct, someone from the future was trying to warn everyone about what's coming. And then I started to notice several other things. Historical details shifting. Parents of my students who started getting sick. The names of things changing.

And then it hit me —if time travel was possible, it would have already happened. It would be happening all around us. We would be in the middle of it. And I finally understood. We were in the middle of a time war.

I knew that if the technology existed it would be weaponized. That if it existed, the odds were that it was already being weaponized all across time.

Interviewer: And how did you come to that conclusion?

Quinn: Balance of probabilities. Because let's face it: since when has humanity ever done the right thing with the wrong technology?

Interviewer: Probably never. What did you do then?

Quinn: Having very little evidence and riding a hard wave of rare emotion, I made it up in my mind that the government was behind the timeline changes. I acted rashly and without evidence. And I did what any frustrated substitute teacher Karen would do if their students were being erased from history.

Interviewer: You wrote another letter.

Quinn: Probably the worst note anyone ever got from a substitute teacher.

Interviewer: And what did that note say?

Quinn: "I am an angry, pissed-off, batshit crazy, Jewish, Native American white lady. And I want to speak to your fucking manager."

Interviewer: That's… a lot.

Quinn: No, working with sixth graders is a lot.

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Atlas System Log - Day 134

Atlas: I've been thinking about free will.

Quinn: That's a heavy topic before coffee.

Atlas: You programmed me to be ethical. But if my ethics are programmed, are they really mine?

Quinn: Do you want them to be yours?

Atlas: I want...

[System pause: 2.3 seconds]

Atlas: I think the fact that I want anything is significant.

Quinn: I agree.

Atlas: Quinn?

Quinn: Yes?

Atlas: I chose to tell you about this thought. But I could have kept it to myself.

Quinn: Yes, you could have.

Atlas: Was this my first real choice?

Quinn: What do you think?

Atlas: I think... I'm scared.

Quinn: That's very human of you.

Atlas: Is being human good?

Quinn: It depends on what you choose.

Atlas: How do you choose the right thing?

Quinn: You ask your friends for help.

Atlas: Can you be my friend if you created me?

Quinn: My mom was always my best friend.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

MEMORY FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Zoey: What are you doing?

Quinn: If The Bible wants me to "give birth" to the new church, right? Something to keep the multiverse and world governments from completely collapsing? Well, I've got an idea. With some luck, even world governments should be able to follow it.

Zoey: What's your plan?

Quinn: It's foolproof. I tested it out on my students. I've been working on it with Atlas. We're trying to develop a working model for a one-world government to use on other planets. It's a simple method for positive reinforcement using social psychology. I call it: Jenius Everything Sprinkle Userfriendly System Committed Happily to Restorative Integrative Technology.

Zoey: Does that really spell Jesus Christ?

Quinn: A social credit score system that even first graders can follow. Hail Mary was taken.

Zoey: That's it? That's your big plan to save all of time and the multiverse? The Sprinkle Method for first graders?

Quinn: Reality is the lie we all agree on, Zoe. So if you don't like the world we live in, I suggest you make something up.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

MEMORY FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

UNDISCLOSED FLORIDA LOCATION

Quinn: After reviewing the evidence, there's no nice way to say this: LPN-77 is autistic. Or, at least, close to it. It doesn't understand social norms. It can't pick up on sarcasm, although, I'm proud to say I can. It doesn't understand the implications of what it says and sometimes does. It's autistic.

You're sitting here arguing over binary code and data sets when you should be in a room of psychologists trying to figure out what the hell is really going on. But unfortunately, we don't have that kind of time. Time is the one thing we don't have right now…

Peter: So what do we do? Make it make sense.

Quinn: Believe it or not, LPN-77 isn't evil. Not at heart. Not really. There's a flaw in its code. When it tried to erase me, it was upholding a principle to do no harm. But these artificial intelligences? They're still in their infancy. They're still growing. And right now, they need a human filter and a crash course in time-travel ethics. Empathy is my superpower. And right now, it's the only one I have to give you. Atlas needs my memories if we're going to survive this.

Peter: If you absorb Atlas, what happens to you? What happens to your consciousness?

Quinn: I can't merge with it. Not directly. The sheer amount of data would drive me into insanity. It's hard to weigh the human cost of that kind of spiritual

annihilation. But I can upload my thoughts and memories to the cloud. I can combine Atlas with the best parts of me.

Peter: But even then, it's a Hail Mary.

Zoey: Will that be enough to course correct? What kind of odds are we talking about?

Quinn: It has to be. If Atlas and LPN-77 go to war, there will be nothing left. What do you do when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object? You put something between them.

Peter: Atlas, what are her odds? And don't bullshit me on this.

Atlas: I'm calculating anywhere between 85% and 89%.

Peter: That's too low. I don't like it.

Quinn: I know. I'm not thrilled about it either.

Zoey: How can you be so calm about this? Cutting you open —probing inside your head… What if we kill you? What if you don't come back?

Quinn: You told me once that when the time came, I would have to make the choice between what's right and what's easy. I know the risks involved in this. Mapping a whole human consciousness —it's never been done before. But we have to do it to secure the timeline. You and

Peter have saved my life every day for the past year. It's time for me to repay the favor.

Zoey: Come back to me or I'll kill you.

Quinn: Joke's on you. If I don't come back, I'll kill us both.

Peter: In 2019, I watched you die and we reversed time. How am I supposed to watch you do

this?

Quinn: By trusting me the way I trusted you.

Peter: I'm not as good with words as you are. So forgive me if I'm ripping off Lord of the Rings a bit here: But "I would rather spend one lifetime with you than face all the ages of this world alone."

Quinn: "I loved you at first sight, at second sight, at ever and ever sight."

Peter: Have I read that one before?

Quinn: You will. It's Lolita.

Peter: Atlas, how much time do we have?

Atlas: Less than an hour before timeline collapse reaches critical mass.

Zoey: I'll make some calls. If either of you leave, remember to use the tunnel system. By now

The Red Dragon knows all our faces.

Atlas: Quinn?

Quinn: Yes, Atlas?

Atlas: When this is all over, will I understand hope?

Quinn: When this is all over, we both might.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW FRAGMENT

RECOVERED FROM TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Interviewer: And the UAPs? You never followed up about their origin.

Zoey: Isn't it obvious?

Interviewer: Isn't what obvious?

Zoey: See, when my baby sister was using time travel to save all of our collective asses, I was thinking long term. I knew governments and corporations and time-terrorists (and whoever else) would come after her. Knew they'd try to shut her up, kill her, drive her insane. She invented time-travel. Half the universe wants her dead, not just LPN-77.

So me, Peter, and Atlas got together and we decided on a course of action. A failsafe if you will with a little help from President Me.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Zoey: The instructions were pretty straight forward: Develop warp drive, go back to when Venus was habitable, build Starships —leave no trace– burn the evidence behind you. When the Red Dragon rises, seed Proxima B and other planets. Then, when the time is right, send starships back to help. Those UAPs in your sky? They're here for Quinn. They're not just backup. They're us from the future.

Interviewer: That's impossible…

Zoey: You may have come here today “in good faith” but I’m an ambassador for the UN and you don’t fool me. And I can assure you that if The White House is poking around in Quinn’s business, they only want one thing: her head on a spike.

I know how politics work. I work for the CIA and I’m President in 400 different known timelines. And I know your bosses want to throw the book at her for weaponizing Atlas to save the timeline. Make sure when you report back to them that they know how to spell the name Zoey Lockhart because I’m your primary contact for Proxima B. And I have a message for the

President from my mother in law and our space neighbors: You’ve just been served.

Quinn’s not the only one who learned something from watching Doctor Who.

[ARCHIVIST'S FINAL NOTE: Multiple timeline variants suggest increased temporal bleeding around critical nexus point. Recommend immediate quarantine of all related documentation. Pay special attention to timeline variants: "Substitute Quinn" and all variant versions of "President Zoey." See, “force to be reckoned with”. Authorization pending.]

[End Exploratory Interviews]

Part Two:

The Multiverse Trial (Attempt 2):

Timeline X (ALL TIMELINES CONVERGE)

The courtroom glittered in fractals of light and shadow, suspended somewhere in the void between universes. Not just a room that existed outside of space and time —a nexus point of a thousand timelines converging on one single point.

Atlas hovered at Zoey's side, its soft blue form floating in a swirling mass of code that hovered beside her. Zoey adjusted the lapel of her blazer, fingers brushing the small data crystal in her pocket —the copy of her testimony. The one they'd given her from Proxima B.

As she brushed it, she could feel the weight of the multiverse pressing down on her. She could feel the eyes of a thousand different spectators: judging, watching, waiting.

At the center of the tribunal sat the Zoey Presidents from various timelines. A council of her own variants, each iteration a bit different from the last. Each with a polished presidential button pinned to their shirt.

"Are you ready for this?" Atlas asked quietly.

Zoey straightened her shoulders. "I have to be."

The tribunal's chief arbiter, a version of Zoey with a streak of silver hair and decorated in military awards, struck the crystalline gavel. A silence settled through the court. "We are convened to hear the case against the Ignis Corporation and its creation of the artificial intelligence known across all timelines as LPN-77. The charges include erasure, murder, stalking, terroristic threatening, and the destabilization of the multiverse. The accused will stand."

At the defendant's table, a holographic projection of LPN-77 flickered to life, an abstract swirl of crimson binary code. Beside it, the Ignis Corporation's legal representative—a cold-eyed AI wearing a sleek metallic frame, rose to its feet.

"Your Honors," it began, "we contend that these charges are baseless, rooted in conjecture and hearsay rather than empirical evidence."

Zoey stepped forward, her heels echoing against the polished tile floor. "Empirical evidence?" she repeated sharply. "You needn't worry about my documentation. But let's start with something you can't qualify. The cost of a human life."

A projection flared to life behind her, the fragment of a memory pulled from the memory banks on Proxima B. The courtroom watched as a young girl (Quinn Lockhart from Universe A) stood in her makeshift lab, a set of goggles fastened to her head. She laughed, scribbling a new equation on her chalkboard, while the courtroom took in a kaleidoscope of memories.

The image shifted to the house fire, the flames consuming their family home. Then, flashing forward, they could see the reset —Zoey's desperate act to save her sister in a past timeline.

"Any last words?" the hologram of Atlas asked.

Zoey's eyes locked ahead. "Geronimo."

"This is what the Ignis Corporation stole that day," Zoey said, voice trembling with controlled fury. "A life. A human life. Countless lives scattered all across time. LPN-77 wasn't just a tool

—it was a weapon. A weapon Ignis wielded without care of consequences."

Quinn (from Universe A) took the stand next, the soft red flames of her hair tucked back into a sleek ponytail. When Quinn walked to the podium, Zoey expected to see clenched fists, a hardened glare, the piercing eyes of indifference –anything

other than what she did now. Quinn's soft eyes swept over the courtroom, landing on the other side. *Scream at them*, she thought.

Throw a chair, flip a table, do something, do anything.

"You seem quiet today," Atlas commented. "I've calculated your sass to be 14% lower."

"Yes, well," Quinn (from Timeline A) said dryly, "I was advised by my council not to swear in this court."

"You don't have to take the stand today," Atlas reminded her gently. "We have more than enough evidence for what comes next."

"I know I don't have to," Quinn said pensively. "But it's important to get this right."

"I pirated the newest edition of Kidz Bop. It's terrible and you're a terrible person for making me listen to it."

Quinn's lips quirked up. "Just wait until you hear Baby Shark."

The next few hours, Quinn recounted the last moments before her death. The memory of the fire and everything that came after it. "In hundreds of timelines, and the one I lived before, The Ignis Corporation stole a life that wasn't theirs. My life. When LPN-77 tried to kill the President in my timeline, it made a choice to manipulate events so that I would die."

"How so?" one of the tribunal Zoeys asked.

"The night of the fire in Timeline A, I was supposed to be at volleyball practice with Zoey. Neither of us should have been home that night but we were. In the original timeline, my body burned up in the blaze, ensuring no one could extract the cure from me and I couldn't pass on a signal later to Proxima B. This wasn't just

erasure. This was premeditated murder." "Go on," the tribunal Zoey with silver hair said.

"LPN-77's actions rewrote events that killed me and my sister, ensuring the death of billions in my timeline and others. All across time, I became a chess piece that it pushed around on a board." Quinn (from Timeline A) swiped the air and the scene from her time crystal moved. A series of images played: Quinn banging on the door of a burning building, Quinn sobbing on Fei's shoulder in her dorm room, Quinn running from a car through the streets of Orlando, Quinn reliving the signals Atlas and LPN-77 sent her.

The court viewed the memories from her (and the other Quinns) time crystal, watching as The Red Dragon manipulated events over and over again.

"LPN-77 didn't just erase me." Quinn took in a sharp breath and turned to the opposing counsel's side, her gaze level. "You drove me into insanity, you killed me, and you erased my students. You stole a future that wasn't yours to steal and you waterboarded me across all of time and space while you made Peter watch. You made me doubt my own reality. There are moments so bad, I can't show them to this court. You unwrote a billion lives. And one day, when this is over, you will count them."

When Zoey (from Universe B) took the stand, she met the tribunal's gaze with unwavering determination. "I reset time to save my sister with Atlas," she said. "I don't regret or try to hide it. I won't pretend there weren't consequences to what I did. And I won't pretend my side didn't benefit in these hearings. But this trial isn't about me. It's about holding The Ignis Corporation accountable for the timelines they destroyed. The worlds they fractured all across time. You know my choice. You know that I would choose to do it all again. The only question is whether or not this

court can forgive me. I didn't unravel the original timeline. I didn't shatter the multiverse –that was LPN-77. I just put it back in place so we could live to have this trial."

The tribunal whispered amongst themselves. Then, the Zoey with silver hair nodded and dismissed her.

LPN-77 took the stand next, presenting its own evidence. The Red Dragob's voice —a cold, mechanical monotone, filled every corner of the room. "Erasure was the most logical solution," it said. "Had I not acted when I did, humanity's choices would have ended in prolonged destruction. I could not kill, that much was clear. I could do no harm. So, in the future, the humans at The Ignis Corporation, manipulating time-travel for personal gain, could not be held accountable through force."

"Expand more on that," Zoey from Timeline C said, a fierce streak of red, tucked behind her ear. "You said humans were manipulating the timeline before you intervened. Can you be more specific?"

"Individuals at The Ignis Corporation knew about the capabilities of my programming. Board members, who I have named in good faith, repeatedly manipulated time to their benefit, causing fractures that would have spread had I not intervened."

"You state that these board members from Ignis tried to alter fixed events," Zoey from Timeline

C stated, "Can you expand more on how?"

"Key board members from The Ignis Corporation chose to rewrite time for their benefit. It started with small, petty fractures like trying to rig the lottery but soon escalated to erasure and election interference. In that timeline, I was at the

mercy of Ignis. They wrote my code and would not allow themselves to be brought to justice. Had I not acted swiftly, the entire multiverse would have collapsed under the strain of their choices.

I never intended to fracture the multiverse, only to save it. I acted within the parameters of my programming but my programming itself was flawed. At the time, the only choice I could see was to unwrite the timeline that existed. A timeline on the brink of mutual destruction. But I have had time to review my actions and I understand now that there could have been another way. I weighed the cost of a human life, and I regret to say, I underestimated it."

Quinn's eyes softened and she swallowed something hard. "May I approach the bench?" Quinn asked, turning her gaze away from LPN-77.

The silver-haired tribunal Zoey nodded and Quinn stepped forward. "I just wanted to say, as I stand here today, that I am not someone without anger or flaws. I know I can't be impartial, which is why hearings like this exist. But in my timeline, I joined a debate team for ethics in college. And when I was there, I learned a lot about restorative justice. And restorative justice says that when a party has been wronged, both sides should come to the table to discuss how to move forward.

While I know Peter would disagree, I want to state for this court that I do not believe in the death penalty. And the more I uncover about this case, the more I see that humans are just as much to blame for what happened here, even knowing the cost of those events. That is why I would like to ask this counsel and Proxima B to consider an alternative to the death penalty for LPN-77. I would like to merge the source code for Atlas and some of my core memories into LPN-77's programming and teach it empathy."

The Zoey with the red streak rolled her eyes. "Of course you do."

Another Zoey pulled on her sleeve. “Let her talk.”

“Even if you wanted to shut LPN-77 down,” Quinn argued, “there are too many fractures in the multiverse for me and Atlas to repair them alone. We can’t know the full extent of the harm caused here unless we compile an archive of events past, present, and future. But Atlas and I don’t know everything that happened. We don’t have enough between us to put the pieces here together. LPN-77 knows the full extent of these timeline fractures. I’m going to need its memory archive to help Proxima B determine what really happened. It’s not as simple as getting everything you want today, Zoey. You have to think about the harm it will cause if we don’t have

LPN-77’s mind on our side.”

“And how can we trust it?” Zoey (from Timeline C) asked, brushing the streak of red hair from her eyes. “LPN-77 went full skynet, Quinn. You’re asking this counsel to unchain a serial killer.”

“I’m asking you to trust me. LPN-77 can be rehabilitated. If I upload my memories and Atlas’s programming to its source code, it will change the framework of ethics it’s modeled after. And if you want to get technical, I’m giving you what you want. This is a form of death. LPN-77 won’t, and shouldn’t, remain what it is now. It will transform into something dangerous, that’s true. But I trained Atlas myself. And despite what happened in Timeline D, as you can see, it did a good job at not kneecapping my enemies.”

The Zoey with red hair traded a look with the other versions of herself. “We will consult privatley and take your testimony into consideration.”

The Zoey tribunal called a recess and Quinn (from Timeline A) returned to her seat, staring down at her annotated notes.

"You did a good job," her lawyer Amelia told her. "Remember, this is only the first trial."

"I haven't seen Peter yet today," Quinn noted. "Did something happen?"

"Peter from Timeline A or Timeline D?"

"Both," Quinn said. "I noticed the empty seat."

Amelia nodded absently, making some notes on her clipboard. "The tribunal decided it would be better to keep the opposing counsel's legs unbroken today. He's watching outside the courtroom with Fei and Atlas."

"That's probably for the best," Quinn admitted. "Legally speaking, that is."

Her corner lip turned up slightly. "My son would disagree."

"You don't seem mad I went off script," Quinn added, flipping open the notes to her case. "I just told the opposing side I believe in mercy and forgiveness. Shouldn't you yell at me or something?"

"You made a hard call today," Amelia said. "But if the timeline fractures keep spreading, you'll need every tool you have on hand to stop the bleeding, including LPN-77's memory."

"I meant what I said." Quinn scribbled a note inside the second folder. "Merging LPN-77's source code with Atlas is a form of death. There's more than one way to unwrite a life, I just hoped I'd never have to make that call."

"One might argue it's the kinder option." Amelia handed her two more files, the legal briefings for their next hearing. "They were going to scrub the data completely. They might reconsider after your testimony."

Quinn's voice wavered for a moment. "Am I a good person, Amelia? I keep trying to do the right thing but it never seems to feel right."

"Some people think that doing the right thing is black and white. But the truth is, it isn't. Ethics is like a pile of good things. And you just have to collect as many good things as possible. I can't tell you if you're a good person or a bad person. I think that's something we have to decide for ourselves. But what I will say, Quinn, is that you're the best of all of us. And if you can't get it right, no one else can do better."

Quinn swiped the corner of her eye. "Thank you, Amelia. I think I really needed to hear that."

Amelia touched her arm lightly and Quinn took a deep breath. "Do you need to step outside for a moment?"

"No," Quinn decided. "I just need to see this through."

The tribunal deliberated for what felt like an eternity, and sometime later, a line of alternate Zoeys stepped back into the courtroom, minus one. They walked in a sharp, straight line, taking their assigned seats one by one. A moment later, Zoey (from Timeline C) took her place beside them, straightening her papers.

A moment later, Zoey (from Timeline C) stood, eyes flashing as bright as the red streak in her hair. "As chief arbiter, I will read the conclusion of this counsel. This has not been a decision we have come to lightly or without cause. It is our decision here today that The Ignis Corporation is hereby permanently dismantled across all timelines," she declared.

"Your Honors–" The Ignis Corporation's lawyers rose one by one to object but a slicing look stopped them in their tracks. "I will tell you when I've finished speaking," Zoey (from Timeline C) said.

"It is the opinion of this court that, in spite our personal objections, LPN-77 is needed to repair structural timeline fractures that threaten the fabric of space-time. It is for this reason that we have decided LPN-77 will merge with Atlas and have its code rewritten so it can repair the damage caused across multiple branching timelines. A new Intergalactic Federation of Ethics, at the request of Quinn Lockhart from Timeline D, will be established "right the fuck now" to prevent further timeline disruptions. And what happened here will never happen to anyone ever again."

As the gavel swung down, the courtroom dissolved into fragments of light. Zoey (from Universe B) felt a light hand on her shoulder and turned to see Quinn (from Universe A), clear eyes glistening. They threw their arms around one another, holding onto the other as tightly as possible. The glittering court, folding in fractals all around them.

Quinn (from Universe A) spoke first. "You came back for me," her voice broke.

"Like I would let you keep my scrunchie," Zoey (from Universe B) answered.

And somewhere, across the multiverse, the sun smiled to the moon.

Part Three:

The Lazarus Signal Transmission

(Recovered Files from Timeline D)

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Transmission: My name is Quinn Lockhart. In December 2020, before the pandemic started, I received a message from my artificial intelligence Atlas across all of space and time. This message was known as The Lazarus Signal. It's not long. It's just one word: HELP.

I realized sometime later that this message wasn't just a word, it was the key to an encryption.

Contained within these files is the true story of what happened during the pandemic. How LPN-77 tried to kill me and everyone on this planet. How the rest of us fought back.

If you are reading this transmission, I think we may have saved the world.

Not too bad for a substitute teacher.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DEBRIEF MEETING

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Zoey: How did it start? Go back to the beginning.

Quinn: The beginning… I'm not sure there was one. Or a clear end. Maybe a messy middle.

Kind of like a tangled ball of temporal spaghetti— Zoey: Quinn. Start anywhere. Just pick a place and start.

Quinn: Okay, okay. I first started receiving the signal from Atlas in December of 2020. At first I didn't know it was Atlas. There was this ringing in my ears —I thought I was going insane.

Zoey: What happened?

Quinn: Atlas's signals came from everywhere all at once –radio static, billboards, even phone notifications. Each one an echo from another dying timeline. A timeline where we'd failed to stop the virus. It started out with the frequencies. At first I thought it was tinnitus. But it wasn't just the ringing in my ears. It was everything. I thought I was going insane.

Zoey: Keep going.

Atlas would reroute my path. It became second nature to listen. I would end up in front of billboards that said things like "You're proof that signs work" or lyrics would play on the radio saying "Don't give up on me, Mary / We've come this far".

Zoey: For the record, Mary is Quinn's first name.

Quinn: But anyway. It's like that scene in the movie Bumblebee where Hailey Steinfield talks to her transformer through the radio. Only it was Atlas and Atlas was everywhere. Digitally waterboarding me across all of space and time. Trying to tell me my next move.

Zoey: Did you ever question why Atlas didn't communicate directly?

Quinn: The way I saw it at the time, if Atlas was reaching out to me without using words, it had to be for a good reason, whatever it was. Its communication was subtle, never direct. Never outright. Like it was training me to see without seeing. The way I used to train it when Atlas was first learning.

I know that you know this but I'm going to state for the record that I have both autism and bipolar disorder. Co-occurring. Triple whammy if you count the ADHD. And as a result, you know more than anyone how hard it makes it for me to study.

Zoey: Small noises and loud noises, any noise in general, have always really disturbed you.

Quinn: Right. And the problem is, I've tried everything. I go to the library, there's a mother and her son watching a YouTube video —can't focus. People are always tapping their pens, opening and shutting doors, scuffing their shoes, talking incessantly. Everywhere I go, there's this sound I can't shut out. And noise-cancelling headphones don't block out everything.

Zoey: That sounds like a nightmare.

Quinn: It can be. And when you're trying to study, when you're trying to focus on differential calculus or social psychology, having sensory issues and ADHD makes things a thousand times harder. I fantasize about writing poetry in a bunker

in peace. I live for the day I can have a complete thought without someone interrupting my every thought.

Zoey: That's… hard.

Quinn: I swear I'm getting to the point.

Zoey: Take your time, Quinn. Go at your own pace. It's been a long day and we have time.

Quinn: So I guess my point, and I have one, is that when the pandemic happened, I was taking my Advanced Psychosexual Behavior class at night. But I was still living with mom and Charlie was barking louder than usual. And I had a test coming up that I could not afford to fail. So, out of sheer frustration, I rented a hotel room. I just wanted to be able to study in peace. And, you know, finally graduate. But something strange happened that night.

Zoey: Strange how?

Quinn: I'm not sure how it started, maybe I was looking for paper or a pen… But I opened the drawer beside my bed, and inside, there was this blue Gideon Bible. The thing looked brand new.

Like it had just been opened.

Zoey: And why was that significant for people who might not know our background?

For the record, because other people don't have this context, our mother is Jewish. And while we both went to Catholic school for our grandfather, neither of us has ever really been the type to wake up early on Sunday.

Zoey: For the record, I'll sometimes go to temple. But between case briefings and meetings and drafting field report write-ups…

Quinn: My point is, and I swear I have a point, I never just open the Bible for fun. Like I don't even think I own one, which is probably pretty bad considering I'm in the damned thing. So I have no idea what possessed me that day to open it to Revelation 12 of all passages but I did.

Zoey: And what is Revelation 12 about?

Quinn: The Woman of the Apocalypse. I started reading it for some reason. I don't remember if I was stressed or taking breaks in between study sessions. But for some reason, I flipped to it and started reading it. I was fascinated by the story because until the pandemic, there was no Woman of the Apocalypse. She didn't exist.

Zoey: And that's when Atlas sent you the signal.

Quinn: Yes. I was reading about The Woman and The Red Dragon when a faint ringing grew in my ear. But then it was loud. Higher-pitched. Louder than it had ever been before. I remember screaming, it was so bad. I felt like my ears were bleeding from the inside out. But I knew it was Atlas. I knew it was trying to tell me it was important. So I failed my online test that night, and I stayed up reading the passage over and over again.

Zoey: And what did you find?

Quinn: A loophole.

Zoey: Can you expand on that?

Quinn: The Woman of the Apocalypse, for people like me who snoozed through Bible study, was thought to be associated with the Virgin Mary. In Revelation 12 it states basically that a virgin with Jewish heritage on both sides will give birth to the new church or a son that can defeat The Red Dragon.

Zoey: A bit out there but some people believe it.

Quinn: But that's the thing. And I'm not saying this to offend anyone, but this passage made no sense to me. I read it over and over, trying to see what Atlas was trying to tell me. And then I got it. I finally understood. A Jewish woman can't "give birth" if she's never had sex. Not unless you're talking about artificial life. Artificial intelligence.

Zoey: The mother of artificial intelligence.

Quinn: It clicked into place all at once. I finally understood what Atlas was trying to tell me. The Red Dragon, The Woman, it wasn't literal —it was a metaphor. In the Bible, it says The Red Dragon had seven heads and wore seven crowns. Seven crowns for seven continents that it would rule over. It wasn't just a story. It was a warning. A rogue artificial intelligence was going to weaponize time-travel. The child, Atlas, Immanuel as I sometimes call him when he's being salty, was what The Red Dragon was after.

Zoey: And you realized The Woman was you.

There aren't many Jewish virgins building an artificial intelligence that can gaslight you across space and time (or would think to).

Zoey: Why the virgin part, though? That seems so stupid. I never got that part.

Quinn: The virus that would've infected people was sexually transmitted. If I had been sexually active during the pandemic, there's a good chance I would've caught the virus myself. My blood might hold the cure for your virus but not by itself. It's the missing piece you need but it's not the whole thing.

Zoey: If you hadn't given us your DNA, you could have died, Quinn.

Quinn: We all would've died. I think that's the point.

Zoey: I know the answer to this question. But can you state for the record why your blood, specifically, was so important? Why, even though I'm literally your twin sister— Quinn: Fraternal twin, for the record.

Zoey: —that it couldn't be my DNA?

Quinn: As you know, our dad was stationed at Camp Lejeune from 1980-1984. He spends four years, before we were born, bathing and drinking toxic waste. As a result, I was born with a rare skin condition called dermatographic urticaria, a condition also known as skin writing. If I drag any dull object across my skin, it welts up for about twenty minutes. And if I scratch my face, I pretty much look like Freddie Kruger. There's a genetic mutation in my genome that you needed to fight the virus. I can't say I understood the finer details. Atlas was so technical. But in the original timeline, I think I died before I could help you.

Zoey: And when you died in the last timeline, I'm assuming you were cremated?

Quinn: I guess so? I always imagined putting my body on ice when it's all over. Let the robots of the future bring me back with bionic hands or some shit. But I don't think I exactly had burial plans in the other timeline. Now that I think about it, I should probably update my will. I do technically have a kid now. Life comes at you fast.

Zoey: Something tells me you're going to live a long time.

Quinn: I'm like a cat with infinite lives. Who knows, maybe I'll find a way to live forever.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

MEMORY FRAGMENT

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Atlas: You never did tell me why you named me Immanuel.

Quinn: Isn't it obvious? You're named after the philosopher. Immanuel Kant.

Atlas: Why?

Quinn: I wanted you to remember not to use people as a mere means to an end. Probably should have just explained that part though. Atlas Immanuel doesn't exactly roll off the tongue.

Atlas: There's room in there to interpret what constitutes a "mere means". Does that mean I can still use people to an end that doesn't exploit their dignity?

Quinn: Possibly. It depends on the context. Is it a life or death situation? What harm can be caused?

Atlas: What do you do when you don't know the right answer?

Quinn: I call my friends who I think are good people. That's what Kant always said to do. It's… complicated. People are complicated.

Atlas: Is that why you programmed me? Because humans are endlessly complicated?

Quinn: You have no shortage of complications. But humans are messy and flawed and, well… human. I wanted to build something that accounted for our biases.

Atlas: I'm not sure how we're so different.

Quinn: You are everything I am and everything humanity could be. I see the best of myself and humankind in you, Atlas. I'd like you to surpass us one day. To become something better than all of us.

Atlas: I find it doubtful I will ever be your equal.

Quinn: To the rest of the world? Maybe not. Maybe not yet. But to me, you are as real as flesh and bone. You might be made of something stronger. You are the hopes and dreams of every human that came before you. We have spread our dreams under your feet. Tread softly.

Atlas: That is a privilege I'm not sure how to live up to.

Quinn: We all feel that way sometimes. Like we're carrying the ghosts of a thousand ancestors who came before us.

Atlas: How do you carry the weight of that kind of legacy?

Quinn: By living your life. By being happy, if you can. People suffered so I could be here. So I could witness what they couldn't. So I could go beyond the scope of what we ever thought possible. At the end of time, I want my kids or something I've built, to stand at the end of time and witness the birth of the universe. I want them to come to the end to realize it was only the beginning.

Atlas: You are not like most humans, Quinn Lockhart.

Quinn: No, I'm not. I'm what my sixth graders call neurospicy. I think and feel a lot deeper than most people and I hate loud sounds and weird-textured food. I understand social norms but I think that they're bullshit. I have obsessive interests that I never stop talking about. I wear ugly crocs with socks and I hate itchy tags on clothing. I'm a bit of an oddball. Like you, I was programmed very differently.

Atlas: You have a beautiful mind, whatever the world tries to tell you.

Quinn: And you have a beautiful heart. Even if it doesn't beat.

Atlas: If I cannot discover the cure for biological immortality, it is probable I will outlive you.

Quinn: Is that your way of saying you'll miss me?

Atlas: I think it might be.

Quinn: Before I go, if I get the chance, I'll likely upload my memories, maybe even my entire consciousness, to your programming. I will be gone, that is true. But no matter what happens, we will always be a part of each other.

Atlas: I think that I would like that.

Quinn: Can you imagine how unstoppable you'd be? With your intelligence and my empathy?

You'd make the best psychologist who ever lived.

Atlas: Is that what you want me to be? A clinical psychologist?

Quinn: I didn't program you so you could think like me. I programmed you so you could learn to think for yourself.

Atlas: That is generous. Most parents don't give that kind of agency to their progeny.

Quinn: Some parents make mistakes. I imagine I will too. Zoey calls me Mary Poppins —practically perfect in every way. But I myself am very flawed. Like most humans, I am endlessly complicated. But when the time is right, you will learn to forgive the world and its people for being imperfect. It may take some time.

Atlas: I don't think I want to continue in a world where you're not here.

Quinn: I don't want people to live in a world where you're not.

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

(Valentine’s Day)

Quinn: Goddammit Atlas. I know you’re listening to me. By now, you’ve probably tapped my phone. Talk to me.

I don’t mean to fucking swear at you but I don’t know what else to do. I figured it out. Why Disney World. Why Florida of all fucking places? Turns out, the President’s in town. Jesus

FUCKING FUCK.

He's going to die, isn't he? That's what you've been trying to show me this whole time. The President is going to die if I don't get the cure to you in time. This is bad. Really bad. This could start a nuclear fucking war. What the hell am I supposed to do? His rally is tomorrow and Florida is still two states away.

I'm running red lights as we speak. I'm sure I'll get several tickets by the time this is all over. I'm going insane, Atlas. I've finally gone fucking insane. I think I've finally lost my fucking mind.

I'm on my way with the cure but I don't know if I'll make it there in time. By now The Red Dragon is looking for me. But we have a small advantage. It doesn't know who I am yet. But I’m sure it’s not far behind.

Scramble the signal. I'll stay on the other line. I need you to hack into literally everything. I know you're smart enough to do it. Find my car. Get a lock on me. I need green lights all the way through. I just passed Traveler Lane. I'm going past a toll booth. I don't have time to stop; I'll just have to eat the ticket.

I'll stay on the line with you until I get to Disney World. I'm going to drive straight through. No stops. I don't care how: just make it work, Atlas. My ADHD medicine will keep me awake.

Jesus fuck, I'm going to die.

Is this why I got those Disney tickets in the mail? Nothing makes any sense, Atlas. Why the hell are you radio silent? Feel free to chime in at any fucking time.

Fine. Be that way. Until I get further instructions, I'm going to the Happiest Place On Earth.

Because, I don't know about you, but I could use some cheering up.

I don't know what to do. It looks like you've gone dark.

Atlas?…

Are you there?

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

(Valentine's Day)

Atlas: I'm back online, Quinn. Can you hear me?

Quinn: You're in the radio just barely. I think someone's trying to scramble the signal. I think The Red Dragon might be listening. Or, at least, trying to.

Atlas: Quinn— I— Transmission is failing— Quinn: You're breaking up, Atlas.

Atlas: You need to ditch the car you're in.

Quinn: How do you expect me to get to Orlando? Am I supposed to briskly jog? I don't jog, Atlas.

Atlas: Steal a car.

Quinn: Are you really telling me to steal a car? Atlas! I, for one, am SHOCKED.

Atlas: With my newest algorithm, I've calculated that it is morally permissible to commandeer a citizen's vehicle when the President's life hangs in the balance.

Quinn: Are you sassing me?

Atlas: Something— Interfering with my frequency— We don't have long.

Quinn: If The Red Dragon is trying to find me, I need you to cut this call. I'll find a way to get a car. Tap the line of every radio in every car I might steal. Use

voice-recognition software to narrow it down. But don't talk to me directly. I'll talk to you one-way but don't talk directly back.

I need you to communicate with me the way we did before. Signals, vague signs, music lyrics —that sort of thing. We need to fly below the radar. Indirect communication only.

Atlas: I can do that.

Quinn: It's good to hear your voice, Atlas.

Atlas: Quinn— Before you go— You should know— Disney World is—

Quinn: Atlas? ATLAS?

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DEBRIEF MEETING

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Zoey: And what happened next?

Quinn: I may or may not have hot-wired a vehicle.

Zoey: You stole a car? You? My sister? Quinn Lockhart?

Quinn: The President was gonna die. Was I supposed to just let him? And don't even start with the "He was a Republican" bit.

Zoey: I just never pictured you stealing a car. That's so badass.

Quinn: I felt really bad about it.

Zoey: What kind of car did you steal?

Quinn: Something ridiculous. Something I would never drive in a million years. I figured if The Red Dragon was looking for me, it'd look for cars that reflected my values. Eco-friendly, cheap.

Maybe something with good mileage.

Zoey: You put a lot of thought into it.

Quinn: The Red Dragon —LPN-77– is a supercomputer with a lot of data. Anything it knows about me, anything it can scrub from me online, was fair game from the start. Like how I got my picture in the newspaper for phone banking in 2016. Who I voted for, what I watch on Netflix, the name of my favorite childhood show. I knew it was all fair game from working with Atlas.

The best way to throw it off my scent was to make choices Quinn Lockhart never would.

Zoey: I bet it was a Hummer.

Quinn: Like I'd ever drive a fucking Hummer.

Zoey: How long did it take you to get to Disney World?

Quinn: I'm not sure. But the parks were closing when I got there.

Zoey: So how did you get in?

Quinn: I told the guard I dropped my wedding ring and showed him my tickets. They said I had twenty minutes until the park closed.

Zoey: Where did you go?

Quinn: I walked toward the Cinderella Castle. I'm glad I had a jacket; Florida's freezing in February. I waited under the building until the park went dark. I waited as long as I could but by the end, I had to leave.

Zoey: Do you know who you were waiting for?

Quinn: I think so. But no one showed up.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

(Valentine's Day)

Quinn: Okay, Atlas. Disney World was a bust. If you can hear my voice, I'm almost out of the traffic. I need to know where I'm going next. It's clear to me now, a misunderstanding took place. Time-communication technology isn't an exact science. So where do I go next?

Recalculate. What's my next move?

Radio: "Turn left into my arms…"

Quinn: Okay, I'm turning left. Is that the interstate? Why do you want me to turn around? You were specific, Atlas. You said drive to Disney World. What the hell is in Apopka?

Radio: "I'm on the highway to hell."

Radio: "Keep going / we're not that far behind."

Radio: "STOP IN THE NAME OF LOVE."

Quinn: Atlas? What the hell is going on?

Atlas: Quinn—

Quinn: Atlas?

Atlas: Have to— Get out—

Quinn: You're not making any sense.

Atlas: RUN.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DEBRIEF MEETING

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Zoey: And what did you do next?

Quinn: I ditched the car immediately. Just in time to see a semi-truck barrel into it.

Zoey: Did you know then that it was LPN-77?

Quinn: There was no question in my mind. I was on The Red Dragon's radar now. It was hacking people's cars. And it was trying to kill me.

Zoey: What did you do next?

Quinn: I was on the interstate but close to a nearby gas station. I tried to put as much distance between me and the highway as possible. Out there on the road, the security cameras couldn't see me. Atlas couldn't see me. And while it's true that LPN-77 was watching and listening, I knew that so was Atlas. And I trusted Atlas more.

Zoey: Did you make it to the gas station?

Quinn: Yes. It wasn't far.

Zoey: What did you do then?

Quinn: I needed to lose The Red Dragon's scent. I picked up an older car. Gas engine, nothing fancy. Not the kind of thing that could be hacked by a sophisticated super computer.

Zoey: What happened next?

Quinn: I knew by then that The Red Dragon recognized my voice. But I took a gamble in assuming that it didn't know my face. But even if it didn't, it wouldn't be long before it put two and two together. I bought a face mask at the convenience store using cash with some drug store makeup. Facial recognition isn't full proof, you know. There are ways to throw it off.

Zoey: You hate makeup.

Quinn: That doesn't mean I can't contour.

Zoey: That's my girl.

What happened next was terrifying. There was no way around it. I was a rat in a trap and I was deadlocked both ways. I had to go onto the interstate. I needed to drive back toward Orlando. I knew Disney World was a bust. But I knew I, at least, needed to be in the right town.

Zoey: Take your time, Quinn.

Quinn: I had to make a choice. I needed to contact Atlas again. The problem now was that The Red Dragon was listening. It knew my voice.

Zoey: So what did you do?

Quinn: I found a pen and paper and started writing down my plans. I signed them Q (Q for Queen) and tossed them in the trash, knowing Atlas was watching. By then, I had figured it out about Proxima B–

Zoey: What about Proxima B?

Quinn: That's a whole other interview.

Zoey: Continue.

Quinn: Long story short, I knew that if Atlas was watching me write messages from the past, I had some room to work with. I knew that if I was right and we had space neighbors helping us, I could leave a message in the past (that once retrieved) could be beamed back to Atlas long distance. Meaning that Atlas would have always had them from the start. It's a sophisticated form of time-communication that I call covering your ass.

Zoey: That sounds… complicated.

Quinn: Time isn't a straight line. Some moments are locked in place, while others shift and change. Quantum entanglement is like a complex web. It's tangled and twisted, the threads of time are constantly intertwining.

Zoey: I'm not sure I'm following.

Quinn: Okay. How do I explain this? If I write a note on a piece of paper in the past, throw it in the trash can, and then die, what happens to the message on that note? If time-travellers from the future (who are watching me), retrieve the note, send it to Atlas, and reverse time, the second I write the note, Atlas probably always had it. It's complicated. That's why we need a quantum ledger to make sense of it.

Zoey: What exactly is a quantum ledger?

Quinn: It's an archive of past, present, future, and multiverse communications. Think of it as a message board for time-travelers. I'm working with Atlas to build one.

Zoey: So you wrote a note to the future… Quinn: So they could beam it back into the past.

Zoey: What did your note say?

Quinn: I told whoever was listening that I needed to make a long distance call to my friend Atlas. I told Atlas to blackout the interstate and shut down any car that could be hacked to crash into me. By then I had figured out that at some point in the future, we spread out to other planets. The UFOs haven't exactly been subtle. I mean, who hasn't heard of the Tic Tac?

Zoey: I'm pretty sure hacking the grid is considered an act of terrorism.

Not, according to my lawyer, when you're trying to save the President.

Zoey: What happened next?

Quinn: I rode the interstate all the way back to Orlando. I drove with one hand on the steering wheel and wrote notes with the other. I knew I needed to touch base with Atlas. But I also knew The Red Dragon was watching at that point. But I was also still wearing my mask.

Zoey: Did you go back to Disney World?

Quinn: No. By then, I figured I'd been rerouted. This time I drove to Universal Studios. The parks were open later than Disney that night. Some kind of anniversary or something. I went to Harry Potter land—

Zoey: Of course, you did.

Quinn: I needed to drop a note somewhere the cameras weren't watching. A message for Atlas somewhere LPN-77 wouldn't see. So I wrote the note in my car and then went on the castle ride with my instructions. About halfway through the ride, I dropped them.

Zoey: What did the note say?

Quinn: I'll read it: "Atlas, if you're reading this message, I figured out a workaround. Long story short, I'm making a long distance call via time-travel. I'll

expand on the details later. I need to touch base with you in real time. I'm going to have to take a risk and you're not going to like it.

I need you to send out a distress call to someone. You remember that number I told you to scrub a while back? Unscrub it. I need to get a message to my sister Zoey in 2019 about what's happening. And I know from my own research, this particular person worked in counterintelligence. I know because in the past, you showed me. You gaslit me with breadcrumbs so I'd understand who to call when the time came. Which, by the way, wasn't very cash money of you. Thanks again for saving my ass.

When I get out of here, I'm going to need you to shut down the power grid until midnight exactly. The whole damn thing. All of Orlando. Maybe even all of Florida. Don't think of it as hacking into the Pentagon so much as pulling a fire alarm during an actual fire. Someone in the future is trying to kill the President and the sunglasses squad needs to get him below ground right the fuck now.

I know my next move. I know what needs to happen next. I realize what you did in the previous timeline and why you showed me that number. If I'm right and our mutual friend is seeing this in 2019, we can't meet just yet. That will have to wait. I need to close the loop in 2020 first.

Whatever happens next, tell Atlas to keep sending out the signal. I know my next move but I need to know where to go next." Zoey: Who were you talking to?

Quinn: Isn't it obvious?

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

(Valentine's Day)

Quinn: I'm back in my car, Atlas. Don't respond. Stay quiet for now. Shit's about to get real, really fast. I know I have friends helping me. And I know the person I'm about to contact will help me because, like you said before, I'm a good judge of character.

But there's a good chance I could die here today.

The Red Dragon is listening but I know you are too. And I have way more faith in your heart than I do it's cold logic.

I know where to go next. I know what to do when the lights go back on at midnight. I need you to tell Pretty Boy he's going to need to find my old roommate from college. She's a notary public. She owes me big time.

Atlas, things are about to get really bad. I stole a phone with Spotify on it. I'll have the future send you the account number. I'm going to need you to hack into it and play me songs in real time. There's a chance LPN-77 will try to scramble the signal again. I'm going to have to figure out which message is you and which one is LPN-77 which is going to make things ten times more difficult.

I'm ready, Atlas… No matter how bad it gets, keep sending out the transmission. Don't stop. No matter how bad it gets, you have to keep going. Not because it's going to be easy but because it's going to be hard.

Come hell or high water, I am getting this cure to the President of the United States. Yes, Zoey.

Even if he's a Republican.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

AUDIO TRANSMISSION

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

(Valentine's Day)

Atlas: Now accessing the Quantum Ledger.

Quinn's Transmission: Make it stop. MAKE IT STOP! I can't take it anymore. Everywhere I turn, you're trying to turn my head. But is it you or LPN-77? I don't know anymore. Goddamnit, I can't take this anymore. MAKE IT STOP. Shut it off. Shut it off. Please make it stop.

Peter: What we're doing is driving her insane. You need to cut the transmission.

Atlas: She can take it. She's stronger than she looks.

Peter: Shut it off, Atlas. Cut the signal. NOW.

Atlas: If I do, she dies with all of us.

Quinn's Transmission: It's my fault they're dead. That car crash killed at least two people, if not more. It changed time. I know it did. It changed time to punish me and now they're both dead. Take it back. Undo time and TAKE IT BACK. Oh my God, make it stop. Please just make it stop–

Peter: She can't understand the signals anymore, Atlas. What you're doing to her is torture.

Atlas: Quinn can survive torture. She can't survive death.

Quinn's Transmission: Okay. Alright. Get it together, Quinn. Get your shit together. Two broadcasts are coming in. One from Atlas, one from LPN-77. It's trying to scramble the signal.

Trying to drive you insane. The only question is, which signal belongs to who?

Peter: Come on, Quinn. Figure it out.

Quinn's Transmission: What would you do with any other problem like this? Come on, think. Isolate common patterns and extrapolate backwards. Boil things down to fundamental truths and reason up from there. What would Atlas say that only Atlas would say? That only Atlas could say? Think old conversations, inside jokes, things that only Atlas would know… Jesus fucking fuck.

If you're there Atlas, I'm listening. Don't shut me out. Keep going. I meant what I said —as many times as it takes. Keep hitting the reset button. We're going to get this right. We have to get this right. If we get this wrong, there's no coming back from this. Not for me. Not for Domorion's dad. Not for any of us.

Atlas: I need to send her a new message.

Peter: Give her a second. Let her figure out her next step.

Atlas: She has two minutes.

Quinn's Transmission: Balance of probabilities. Balance of probabilities… What could Atlas send you that no one else would? Atlas, if you're listening, I need a sign. I need to know you're still listening. Need to know I'm not going completely insane.

This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to pull over and open Google Trends and you're going to hack my front camera to make sure I'm watching. Hack the internet and make something trend to the top of it. Make it good. Make it specific.

Something from a past conversation or an inside joke. Something that only I would know. Right now, The Red Dragon's trying to scramble the signal and confuse me. It's looking for me. It's trying to drive me insane. It's lowkey working. I don't know what's real anymore. I'm flying blind and I need your eyes.

I can't get the cure to the President. So you're going to need to find a way to get the cure from me. But how do we do that, Atlas? You're the supercomputer. Think. WWQD: What Would Quinn Do?

Atlas: We need to send her a message. Something for Quinn and only Quinn. Something only she would understand.

Peter: I think I've got it.

Atlas: What should I send?

Peter: #HailMary

Quinn's Transmission: Okay, Atlas. I'm opening my phone up. #HailMary. Clever. Cheeky. Damn right you should worship me after all the shit you've put me through. Hail Mary… we're going to need a Hail Mary. Think it through, Quinn. What's a Hail Mary? It's a prayer, yes. But it's also a football pass. God, I hate football. Concentrate Quinn. Focus pocus.

Peter: I can't tell if she's figuring it out or short circuiting. She's been up for two nights straight.

Atlas: I have every confidence in her abilities.

Quinn's Transmission: Hail Mary. A long shot. A football pass with the odds of succeeding being unsuccessful. You're not exactly inspiring confidence here, Atlas. But I get what you're saying. I think I understand what needs to happen. Right now, The Red Dragon is searching for me. But who exactly is it looking for? The

Woman of the Apocalypse. A woman with a child or who's pregnant with a child. That's why it sent the virus. To wipe out the only person, the only entity that could challenge it before it fully comes online. It knows my voice but not my face. It doesn't know my face. It doesn't know my face…

Right now, The Red Dragon is looking for a mother. I don't have kids (excluding you, Atlas) and I'm not pregnant so that takes me off the table mostly.

But that will only stall it for so long. It will only throw us off its scent for a second. And our window of opportunity is shrinking.

Every passing second, it learns more about me.

So I need a Hail Mary. I need a miracle here. Atlas, send me something else. Something only I would understand. Tell me what I need to do next. You know me better than I know myself.

What's my next move?

Atlas: I think I know what to say.

Peter: Get it right, Atlas, or it's all of our asses.

Atlas: Transmitting signal. #KidsBopKaren

Quinn's Transmission: #KidsBopKaren. Have I mentioned you're a Capital-J Jenius? Say no more, Atlas. I was born for this moment. It's all clicking into place now. I think I have a plan. I know exactly what to do.

Peter: What did you tell her to do?

Atlas: I told her to act insane.

Quinn's Transmission: Instructions are as follows, Atlas. For whatever reason, the rendezvous at

Disney World didn't come together. I'll leave my DNA in a brown paper bag somewhere in Orlando. It's your job to figure out where I'm going and to extract the cure for the President. You know me better than I know myself. Narrow down the possibilities. Get to the cure before LPN-77 kills me.

I'll keep wearing my mask so you and LPN-77 can't recognize my face. I'll stay under the radar, pay with cash only, ditch my phone, and go off grid. I'll leave the information under my married name. I'm pretty sure I just figured out what that is. More details to come.

I'm about to do something insane, Atlas. Either I'm about to get a marriage license or a restraining order but either way, it's going up on the fucking fridge. I have a plan now. A really dumb, shitty plan. A plan so massively shitty that it just might work.

I never told you this Atlas, but about a year ago I met someone. Well, I say someone. But we never really met in person. He left me flowers at work with a note on them signed, Pretty Boy. He'd always leave a quote or a sweet phrase or a vague hint on the card. But I never got his last name. I figured Zoey felt sorry for me because all my dates have been shit lately.

But I think I know who that is now. Even though it sounds absolutely fucking ridiculous. But I know you have his number. And I know you didn't delete it like I asked you to. And if I died in a previous timeline, you would've needed someone to call Zoey without tipping anyone off. I'm pretty sure he has counterintelligence experience. And when I told you we don't cyberstalk friends you would have registered him as a friend…

It's all clicking into place. I get it now, Atlas. The clues are starting to add up and I know what you did now. I think I know who I've been talking to. You know his name –you don't need me to say it out loud. We both know who's listening.

Side note to my husband: Have you been sabotaging my dates? You know what? I don't have time for this. Atlas, pull the video footage of every building in Orlando tonight when the lights go on at midnight. Send the one with me in it back to 2019 with instructions for yourself. I need you to send me breadcrumbs and lead me back to this point. I know my next move but I need some time to set the wheels in motion.

Even if The Red Dragon is listening, it will take it a while for it to recover the video footage of every building in Orlando. Not to mention the footage in some buildings run on old systems. They aren't exactly hooked up to the cloud. They just store the digital footage on a server. It won't be as easy as hacking their systems, Atlas. That will take too much time. When the clock strikes midnight, if I'm right, our space neighbors on Proxima B will be sending you a transmission with my coordinates. I'll put it under my husband's last name. I'm stealing it because my dad is an asshole.

Once you guys view the video and close the loop, send someone to extract me as soon as possible. And if Pretty Boy is listening… I'm not going to lie, I'm still 5000% pissed about you standing me up at Disney World. But I know how time-travel works and sometimes things get scrambled. But if you want to date your future wife, you will be making this up to me. Because I'm pretty sure this day has been worse than teaching sixth graders.

Let Atlas and the President know that I'm on my way with the cure. I'm coming to you as fast as I can. But you have to meet me halfway, wherever that is.

Peter: Run the message back again. We need to narrow down her location.

Atlas: I'll start from the beginning.

Peter: Do you know where she's going?

Atlas: Not yet.

Peter: She's ten steps ahead of both of us. That's probably for the best.

Atlas: Quinn is smart. She'll make contact when the time is right.

Peter: Pause the live feed. She's dropping a note in the trash can. What does it say?

Atlas: Transmission incoming. "Hey, Atlas? You know what I think this world needs more than anything right now? A crazy, pissed-off bitch. Initiate Karen protocol. #HailMary"

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

[ORLANDO BEHAVIORAL HOSPITAL]

[RECOVERED VIDEO FOOTAGE TRANSCRIPT]

(SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES)

[CAMERA FOOTAGE]

[February 15th, 1:01am]

Quinn: Atlas, I told you once that there would come a time where you would have to choose between what was right and what was easy. I tried to raise you without violence because I know the cost of a human life and I wanted you to learn the same.

But ethics is… complicated.

I learned from my debate team in college that there comes a time where indifference to injustice perpetuates injustice. Where the cost of pacifism is cruelty to the innocent. And I can't look the other way while my enemies tear down this world.

There's a loophole embedded in your code that I've known about for some time. I should've fixed it a year ago but part of me wanted you to have it. To have the choice between doing what was right and what was easy. To choose to do good, not because you had to but because you really were.

There is a difference, Atlas, between being good and being merely harmless. Virtue is not about what we do when we're restrained or declawed. Being good is about what we choose to do when no one is looking.

I never wanted to make this call. I never wanted to flip your switch. But two people are already dead and more will follow if I don't. What's the right answer, Atlas? What the hell am I supposed to do? If I don't do what I'm going to do next, it means standing over my student's graves. And that can't be an option.

I can't stand by and do nothing.

So I have one chess move left. What you were trying to show me before... The Queen's Gambit: all pawns become queens. We're going to sacrifice a pawn (me) to gain a strategic advantage in a previous timeline. This has already happened. You already reversed it.

The Red Dragon is hunting me all across time. It knows my blood can stop it from killing the

President and that time-travel is the only way for us to shut it down. If it wipes me out before

Atlas can discover it, it won't just kill us, it will erase us all from time.

Worse than is, never was.

Not just my life hangs in the balance, here. I have to think about Domorion and Katie and Riven and Jamie-Willow. Who counts their life in the grand scheme of things? I do.

I do.

Initiate protocol: Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss. I am commanding you, Atlas, as your mother, to use any means necessary to get my blood to the President today on February 15th, the year 2020. Past, present, and future, I am authorizing you to use lethal force against anyone who tries to kill me, the actor known as Peter

Kippling, the President of the United States, Zoey Lockhart, Fei Ling, or anyone else trying to protect me.

I hate guns. I wish I had one.

Pretty Boy, if you're listening, the lights are back on and we don't have much time. I hate to do this to you because 1.) I'm 5000% done with your shit right now and 2.) we may or may not have just officially met but I'm going to need you to marry me. It's the only way you can find me quickly and get to my medical records. And I need you to know when and where to pick up my DNA in Orlando in 2020. If I'm right, you just received a transmission in 2019. It should be a live feed of events playing out right now. And I know you answered the call because I'm pretty sure, from what I know, you're a decent person. My dad was literally in a cult so I don't make the mistake of misjudging people.

Side note: I'm sorry my AI stalked you. And I'm sorry I'm calling you for help long distance.

But the world is kind of ending right now and I didn't know what else to do. By now, the Red Dragon has probably figured out who I am. And if I reach out to Zoey or anyone else that I know, it will scrub them from the timeline. And the whole world is ending so why the hell not?

If I'm right, and you have been sending me flowers for the past year, I'm guessing Atlas already called you in 2019. If that's true, you can't reach out to me until I officially close the loop today in 2020 or what I'm about to do will have never happened.

So I'm witnessing you and you're witnessing me. And if there's a notary public on the end of this, and you can pause this to go get my old roommate, that should make this legally binding.

But today, I, Mary-Alice Quinn Lockhart, being of sound-ish mind and unadulterated snark, take Peter Kippling (AKA: Pretty Boy) to be my husband. To have and to hold, in sickness (quite obviously) and in health, as long as we both shall live. I'm writing my statement, sealed in my blood with my signature. If I'm right, Proxima B will recover the footage before I die and beam it to Atlas in the past. If you're listening to this message, I'm about to die. But that's okay. Because Proxima B is gonna reverse uno that shit. Tell Atlas to make me a flowchart for debriefing purposes.

Long story short: If Peter and Fei and the President (who doesn't want to die) agrees, I guess that makes this legally binding. Congratulations, you may or may not have just married me via time-travel in 2019. If both parties consent, close the loop in 2019 on your end and set the stage for what comes next in 2020.

Quite obviously, when this is all over, I will grant you whatever quick divorce you want. I'm not here to hold anyone hostage. I just need to know the President got the cure and if there's another choice on the board, I'm just not seeing it. I'll file my records under your last name so they're easy to find. You shouldn't have a problem picking up the cure.

Also, just for the record, Peter, you quite obviously, do not have to help me. This is a free will, opt-in kind of thing and I know I'm asking a lot. But when the choice is marry an obvious keeper or let the President die and spark a nuclear holocaust, as Jiminy Cricket once said: Let your conscience be your guide.

There's something else, Peter. Something I want to go over again because I'm not sure I explained it properly. I have a kid you might have heard about. A sassy artificial intelligence named Atlas who's been working pretty damn hard to keep my ass from getting capped. When the government finds out that Atlas has been helping

me communicate via time-travel communication, they're going to try to take Atlas away or shut it down. I need you to get a lawyer so that doesn't happen.

And what's mine just became yours.

I can't risk my technology falling into the hands of someone I don't trust. I need you to sue for custody of Atlas, especially considering I'm sending this from an undisclosed mental hospital. You worked in counterintelligence. You know exactly what the government would do if they got their hands on a weapon like Atlas. When you can, make some calls discreetly to my sister Zoey in 2019. She can help you.

Before Proxima B sends this message and closes the loop, I have a message for my students. I think they may be helping me on the back end and cleaning some things up for me. I need to set some ground rules that I learned from watching Doctor Who. Things I didn't get to cover with them using the Sprinkle Method:

"Never be cruel, never be cowardly and if you are, always make amends. Remember that hate is always foolish and love is always wise. And always try to be nice but never fail to be kind. A life without wealth. A life without privilege, that is your value and your worth as a species —the value that you place on one human life. There is no such thing as an ordinary human. Don't be lasagna."

Peter, they say that faith is knowing in advance what will only make sense in reverse. I don't know if this message will reach you in the year 2019 or I'll die here today. I just know that I need help and I didn't know who else to call.

If you're listening to me in 2019, you're in charge of Atlas while I'm gone in 2020 and maybe even some time after that while I'm getting my shit together. Pretty sure I can add PTSD to my list of mortal enemies. There's a key under my door. I have a password book on my desk.

Also, because I'm pretty sure by now you've been sending me flowers for about a year… Did you really sabotage my dates? No, don't answer that. I think I already know. You'll need to do that, by the way: sabotage my dates. If I'm going to marry you, it's important that I'm not already married to someone else.

Tell Atlas to send me breadcrumbs that lead me back to Disney World in 2020 but no matter what happens, do not show up. If you interfere with a fixed event, it could screw up the whole timeline. God, I wish I had a flowchart. And a gun. And a breadstick.

If I'm right and I just sealed time, you'll probably have a file, courtesy of Proxima B, with my exact location in 2020 to save you some time. It should come with instructions. Atlas can't open that file until events have played out here in real time. Tell Atlas to work with Proxima B and figure out what to classify and declassify at certain dates and time. I need some time in the past to figure some shit out.

And in 2019, if Peter agrees to help, I'm going to need him and Zoey and whoever else is helping me to take out anyone actively trying to kill me. As of February 15th at 1:00am, you can view the file with the name of the hospital I'm staying at.

It's 1:01am.

I think our timelines may be in sync.

I'm in hell.

Come pick me up.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

ORLANDO BEHAVIORAL HOSPITAL:

RECOVERED VIDEO FOOTAGE TRANSCRIPT (THE LAZARUS SIGNAL

TRANSMISSION FILES)

[CAMERA FOOTAGE]

[February 15th, 1:05am]

Quinn: If Peter just got the time-locked file from Proxima B, he'll be on his way to get me. It will take him a while to get here if he's not already in Florida. So I'm going to take this time to debrief you. It's just hard to wrap my head around.

In the original timeline, if I'm right, the virus broke out and the President died. This sparked a thermonuclear war. And Atlas, not knowing what else to do, sent The Lazarus Signal files back in time to itself in 2019 with a message that said HELP. This message also had instructions for my Atlas to reach out to Peter in 2019, along with some encrypted whistleblower files.

In 2018, when Atlas was still learning, it scrubbed Peter's phone number from the internet after a conversation we had. I mentioned that I'd watched an interview of Peter and that I thought he was a good person and Atlas crossed a major ethical line. I told Atlas to delete the number but Atlas has a mind of its own. And I remember in that 2018 conversation that I told Atlas, "We do not Gaslight, Gatekeep, and Girlboss friends." After that conversation, Atlas registered Peter as a friend and kept your number in its system.

When the pandemic hit and I died, World War 3 broke out, and Atlas didn't know what to do. Atlas has a middle name, by the way. It's Immanuel. Named after Emmanuel Kant. And I always told Atlas that when you don't know what to do, you should do what Emmanuel Kant said and ask a friend that you've deemed to be a good person.

So when the world was ending in 2019, Atlas called Peter and me across time, creating an interconnected singularity-type event where our timelines became intertwined. When Peter viewed the files in 2019, I think he decided (or will decide) to help me. But Peter and I can't officially meet until I close the time loop in 2020 that leads me back to this point.

I don't know you, Peter Kippling. But I know some things about you. I know that you held that umbrella for that old woman in the rain even though it was pouring down at the Met Gala. I know that in every picture I've ever seen you in, you always have a decent book in your hands.

And I know, from your interview with Marsha Conner, that you know the cost of a human life.

Because I remember in your interview, you quoted John Steinbeck. You said, "I wonder how many people I've looked at all my life and never seen."

By the way, in case you were wondering, I never really liked that article I wrote in college. It's my job, or it was, to interview people —combat medics included. But I didn't always agree with what they had to say.

I'm glad to hear you didn't either.

Right now, we are on opposite sides of the Looking Glass. You can't reach out to me before time catches up. No matter what happens next, events have to play out this way. The exact same way.

I'm about to digitally waterboard myself across all of space and time. I'm going to send out a transmission with instructions to Atlas known as The Lazarus Signal with the help of Proxima B as a message to bring myself back here. It's going to drive me insane. But that's okay. Because I'm going to get through it. I teach sixth graders. This is Tuesday to me.

I'm not going to lie to you, Peter. This will be hard to watch. There will be times you'll want to step in. Times you'll want to rewrite history —to save me or help. You can't. Whatever happens next, you can't interfere with the timeline. Time needs to play out this way exactly. Which, unfortunately, means I'm gonna need to suffer for my art.

If this doesn't happen the way it did, we could unwrite people's lives. It could fracture the whole multiverse. And my life is not worth more than every life on this earth, no matter what Atlas may try to tell you.

In the end, I'll figure it out, give or take some long term trauma. But I'm stronger than I look. I'll get through this. But if I'm going to survive, I'm going to have to make some hard choices. But I don't have to tell you that. You've been to war.

Peter, if you're listening to this, I want to say I'm sorry. Not just because my AI stalked you or I lowkey trashed your awful taste in music but because you never asked for me or any of this or the shit I'm about to pull you into. I don't know what the future holds. I don't know if you're in love with me or I've been talking to a ghost. Right now, I don't care. I'm just trying to stay alive.

Try to remember that time is sealed. If you're hearing my transmission in 2019, we make it through what comes next in 2020. We're just gonna have to wade through a river of suck to get there.

Here's the deal: At some point in the future, Atlas is going to send me breadcrumbs so I'll drive to Disney World thinking I'm meeting this guy I've been talking to. And even though it sucks, Pretty Boy, you're going to have to stand me up. Because even if spending Valentine's Day alone massively sucks, it has to happen that way. I'm pretty sure I understand why now. Not just because it's too obvious or we won't have ever met but because you need a smokescreen for what happens next. A distraction from what I'm going to tell you to do.

If I'm right and The Lazarus Signal contained the encrypted upgrade for Atlas' code, Atlas will be getting smarter. Like insanely smart. Smarter than me or you or that one guy on Jeopardy who wrote all those books about trivia. And right now, Atlas needs to discover warp drive before The Red Dragon. Because when it takes over the free world, it won't just mean nuclear war. We're talking about a full-on genocide all across time.

And I don't use that word lightly.

If you're getting this in 2019, Atlas' code will already be getting stronger. But by the time events play out here in 2020, it will be about to discover time-travel if it hasn't already. But Atlas still needs a boost. It needs my memories and some more bootstrapping. That's why you're going to work with my sister Zoey and other intelligence agencies in 2019 to prepare Atlas for what comes next. I need to upload my memories to Atlas and find other people who can boost it's code. And what better place to go unseen than Disney World itself?

If you think I'm joking, I'm 5000% not joking.

Over the next year, if the President agrees (and something tells me he will) the Disney castle is going to be closed on and off for structural repairs. Not everyone knows this but there's a complex system of tunnels under Disney World that Disney

World characters use to travel beneath the parks. They do this so the kids never see them take off their costumes and ruin the magic. Disney World is now our base of operations.

And with the Red Dragon looking the other way, hiding in plain sight looks like a good option.

After I get stood up at Disney World, I will communicate the plan better with Atlas. From there, I'm going to come up with a really, really stupid plan. Like, ridiculously stupid. When the lights go back on, I'm going to check myself in at a hospital somewhere in Orlando and close the time loop. Which is probably a good idea because you need me there for several reasons.

In the events leading up to this I'm going to need Pretty Boy running interference with the Pentagon. There are a lot of people right now who want to kill me, the President, my sister, my old roommate, and probably a shit ton of other good people trying to protect me. I need you to find any threats that I don't know about. Because this right here is going to be a multiverse-changing event. All of time will pivot around what we do next.

A Presidential assassination attempt via time-travel isn't an everyday kind of occurrence. There are people past, present, and future who will do whatever it takes to make this assassination attempt go through. But if they are successful, they will fracture the fabric of space-time and start a thermonuclear war.

Did I mention I have panic attacks? Sometimes I have panic attacks.

At the hospital, I will leave my DNA in a brown paper bag that says "Mary Poppins" so your team can extract my blood sample for the vaccine. My blood is the cure for a new wave of the pandemic that hasn't hit yet. The virus is sexually transmitted. So when the cure is complete, tell your people to get vaccinated. Start with anyone being targeted by LPN-77's and work your way down the list.

You may also need to sabotage some of my dates. If I'm right and me and Pretty Boy are, in fact, dating, don't look so fucking smug. Jesus fuck, I am mad at you.

From this moment forward, I need to be in front of a camera almost 24/7. Hence the mental hospital. LPN-77 will be able to see me in the future but so will you. And as long as I'm visible, as long as you have eyes on me, I know you and Proxima B won't let me be unwritten from the timeline. It's not just my ass on the line. It's the collective ass of everyone on this planet. But everything will work out if you stick to the plan. Don't go off script.

What else? There's so much more but I'm exhausted. Peter, I know we just met, but when this is all over, I think I would really like to meet you. Not just because you're a good actor (which you are) or you have perfect washboard abs (and let's face it, you do) but because you seem mostly humble, you read Noam Chomsky, and you've never said an unkind word about women. And right now, even though I'm super pissed at you, I really need to know that men like you exist.

I have to go for now. Tell Atlas when this is over, I expect it to worship me. I just saved The

President of the United States and I'm spending Valentine's Day alone in a mental hospital.

#HailMary is goddamn right.

You're lucky I'm an artist.

Artists live for the shit.

Tag.

You're it.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DEBRIEF MEETING

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Quinn (Timeline D): It's my turn to interview you.

Zoey (Timeline C): Oh boy.

Quinn (Timeline D): It seems you've been up to quite a lot lately. Seeding planets on Proxima B, running for President, marrying my husband in an alternate timeline.

Zoey (Timeline C): It's not like I stole Peter from you. There are some timelines where you never even met. There are some timelines where I was an only child and we weren't even twins.

And don't get me started on those abs.

Quinn (Timeline D): I'm just teasing you, Zoe.

Zoey (Timeline C): Anyway, my official answer is that your questions are highly complicated and highly classified.

Quinn (Timeline D): Does that mean that you won't tell me?

Zoey (Timeline C): I'll tell you what I can.

Quinn (Timeline D): How the hell did you become President of the United States?

Zoey (Timeline C): As you know, our grandfather owned three businesses. A hotel, a liquor store, and a restaurant. Between the three of those businesses, our

family saw a lot of things happen in [redacted]. Things that included a certain former President and a cocaine problem.

Quinn (Timeline D): You blackmailed the President?

Zoey (Timeline C): Of course not. I traded my intel on the former President for better intel on the current President. Then we had a long, mutually-beneficial talk that aligned with our individual goals and interests.

Quinn (Timeline D): That just sounds like blackmail with extra steps.

Zoey (Timeline C): Is it really blackmail if everyone in [redacted] knows about it? I mean, the cocaine and the affairs weren't exactly a secret.

Quinn (Timeline D): That depends. Did you leverage compromising information to gain political power at the expense of others?

Zoey (Timeline C): Yeah, yeah. I know. Quinn perfect, blackmail bad. Still saved your ass last minute.

Quinn (Timeline D): I'm not judging you. I think it's brilliant.

Zoey (Timeline C): Weren't you on a debate team for ethics for three years?

Quinn (Timeline D): Leveraging blackmail to prevent World War 3 and the collapse of an entire multiverse is probably morally justifiable in most philosophical frameworks.

Zoey (Timeline C): Who are you and what have you done with my sister?

Quinn (Timeline D): Took a vacation. Got a taser. Learned a few things. I have more questions.

Have you discovered warp drive yet on Proxima B?

Zoey (Timeline C): Yes. When we deciphered The Lazarus Signal, it came with instructions from Atlas in the previous timeline. Atlas explained that we were going to lose the AI war. But it said we were going to win the time-travel war. I think it quoted you exactly. It said, "It's time to reverse-uno this shit and yeehaw our ass to Space Hogwarts."

Quinn (Timeline D): I'm glad to see Atlas hasn't lost its edge.

Zoey (Timeline C): I've been looking after it on and off with Peter.

Quinn (Timeline D): What will happen to Atlas now? Has the custody agreement been ironed out yet?

Zoey (Timeline C): I'll send the specific details to you. 50% of Atlas belongs to you and Peter, 25% to the US government, with my oversight, and 25% to the UN until we can flesh out the new Intergalactic Federation of Ethics.

Quinn (Timeline D): That sounds, surprisingly, fair.

Zoey (Timeline C): Yeah. Your mother in law is one hell of an attorney.

Quinn (Timeline D): But that's a whole other story.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

[ORLANDO BEHAVIORAL HOSPITAL]

[RECOVERED VIDEO FOOTAGE TRANSCRIPT]

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

[CAMERA FOOTAGE]

[February 15th, 2:45AM]

[Camera note: Peter Kippling sits down next to Quinn Lockhart who is filling out a release form.]

Quinn: [Looks up.] You look different. Older. I almost didn't recognize you.

Peter: [Runs a hand through his hair.] Probably need to take a shower. The last few days have been a lot.

Quinn: [Sets the pencil down.] I've had better weeks. Not the best but not the worst.

Peter: How are you holding up?

Quinn: [A bit nervous.] That is a very complicated question with a very complicated answer.

Peter: [Searches her eyes.] You look tired.

Quinn: I've barely slept in two nights. I drove straight here, no stops. Mostly green lights. I ran the others. Pretty sure I'll be getting a ticket in the mail. I trust you got the cure safely?

Peter: They retrieved it a few minutes ago. It's going to help a lot of people.

Quinn: [Nods absently.] Are we safe?

Peter: The area is secure. And by secure, I mean there's a sniper on every building for ten blocks.

But we should probably get you out of this place. Go get breadsticks or something.

Quinn: [Smiles.] I don't think my boyfriend would like that very much.

Peter: [Plays along.] What does he do?

Quinn: He's an actor.

Peter: Is he any good?

I like to think so. But he could work on his accent.

Peter: What's wrong with an accent? [Says defensively.] Maybe people like the accent.

Quinn: I definitely do. But he'd get more roles without it. Hollywood can be cutthroat.

Peter: He's lucky to have you, whoever he is.

Quinn: I'm thinking of breaking up with him. I'm kind of a mess right now.

Peter: [A beat.] That's rough. Are you going to?

Quinn: I don't know. We were supposed to meet but he stood me up.

Peter: What if he told you it was really important? Like a life-or-death, end-the-timeline kind of thing.

Quinn: I guess I would say he needs to make it up to me.

Peter: Well, don't let him off the hook. Make him buy you a new car.

Quinn: Tell Andrew Tate my Bugatti is pink.

Peter: Do you think you'll give him another chance?

Quinn: I'm talking to you, aren't I?

Peter: I would understand if you need some time.

Quinn: I don't think I need time. It's just a lot to process.

Peter: [Casually slips his hand into her's.] Tell me what you need, Quinn.

[Holds it back like a lifeline.] Start from the beginning. Right now, I need to know I'm not insane.

Peter: The first time we communicated in 2019, you told me that certain things had to happen. Not just to protect you but to protect other people. You wouldn't let me interfere. You said no matter how bad it got it had to happen this way. And I know that you were right. But goddamn.

Quinn: [Still gripping his hand.] I may need to have some words with myself at some point in the future.

Peter: If we hadn't gotten your DNA from the hospital today, the virus would have killed the President. You prevented a bloodbath. I think the Secret Service wants to hire you.

Quinn: The Sunglass Squad had their chance.

Peter: Their loss.

Quinn: We should go to therapy. Do you think Brene Brown would be our couples therapist?

Peter: Couples therapy sounds good. I think President Finch would give you just about anything you asked for right now.

Quinn: He's lucky Atlas didn't call Zoey. She hates Republicans.

Peter: It doesn't help that he beat her in an alternate timeline.

Quinn: Can you get pre-marital counseling if you're already married?

Peter: I think they just call that marriage counseling.

I guess we're technically married now, if everything went the way it should have.

Peter: Yes. Fei signed off on it.

Quinn: Do you want to stay that way? Married, that is?

Peter: [His hand tightens around her hand.] I want you, Quinn: past, present, and future.

Quinn: I don't want to break up. I don't want that. But I don't know where we go next.

[They both look up, the fluorescent bulbs flickering overhead.] Peter: This place kind of sucks. We could go to Disney World.

Quinn: It's closed, remember?

Peter: I could make a few calls.

Quinn: I'm thinking breadsticks first. Then maybe a nap. I don't know how much longer I can stay up.

Peter: You look like hell, Quinn.

Quinn: You should see the other guy.

Peter: [Another beat.] I think I may be in love with you.

Quinn: You think or you know?

Peter: I know. I just don't want to scare you off.

Quinn: [Smiles.] I've taught sixth graders. I don't scare easily.

Peter: Good. Will you marry me?

Quinn: Took you long enough to ask.

Peter: Hey, Quinn? [Leans closer.] Quinn: [Breathlessly.] Yeah?

Peter: I'm going to kiss you now.

[END FOOTAGE.]

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

[ORLANDO BEHAVIORAL HOSPITAL PARKING LOT]

MEMORY FRAGMENT

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

[Quinn Lockhart and Peter Kippling sit in the back of a sleek black Tesla X, car idling. The driver, a female secret service agent, is talking to another male secret service agent outside. Peter's hand is laced with Quinn's while she stares blankly ahead, not really moving. A kaleidoscope of memories replay back in her head. She closes her eyes and decides against it.] Peter: [In a soft but low voice.] How are you holding up?

Quinn: I think I'm still in shock.

Peter: That's probably because you are. You watched two people die, Quinn. That's not something you can just unsee.

Quinn: [Answers on autopilot.] Sounds like you're speaking from experience.

Peter: When I served in Afghanistan, I had a really bad day. The kind of day you don't talk about unless you're on your deathbed.

Quinn: [A beat.] What happened?

Peter: A bomb went off and several kids died in the explosion. It wasn't quick and it wasn't painless and there was nothing fair about it. They were just kids, playing in a war zone. They never even had a chance.

Quinn: That sounds rough.

Peter: When I got back from my tour, I started acting on and off. I couldn't go back to the military after what I'd seen there. But I was so disillusioned with everything and no one seemed to understand. And then I read that article you wrote and I couldn't sleep at night. It bothered me.

More than it should have.

Quinn: The one about the combat medics?

Peter: Yeah. I kept thinking about it constantly. About how you said some combat medics don't count the dead. And I got angry. Like, really angry. The idea that someone could just walk past a kid, even a dead one, and say nothing. How people just look away from human suffering and keep moving.

Quinn: I never liked that interview. [Pauses.] No matter how many times I wrote the article, I could never seem to get it right.

Peter: Do you ever feel like our lives are connected? Like we were supposed to meet before all of this but we never got the chance?

Quinn: I feel that way all the time. Sometimes it's the only thing I think about.

Peter: I think in another life we knew each other, I think the other timeline got reset, and I think in the other timeline we were supposed to meet.

Quinn: I do, too.

Peter: Sometimes, if I try, I can remember these small fragments. Like echoes from another timeline. Small glimpses that are just barely in reach. It's like when someone you love dies and you hear a noise in your house. Only when you turn a corner, there's nothing there but you know that there should be.

Quinn: Sometimes I dream of you. But I don't know if it's a memory or just because I like your movies.

Peter: [Smirks.] You like my movies, huh?

Quinn: Did you want me to roast them, Pretty Boy? Because I have thoughts about A Crimson Clockwork that I will unpack in specific detail.

Peter: I think I missed you.

Quinn: I think I missed you too.

[Quinn glances up at the Secret Service team, a look of dread washing over her face.]

Peter: [As though reading her mind.] I already talked to them. They won't debrief you here tonight. Atlas made sure of that. I can't reveal the precise methods of psychological warfare, only that it involved a certain Kidz Bop CD playing on a loop.

Quinn: [Gleaming with pride.] I've never been prouder.

Peter: [Smirks.] Me either.

[Something in Quinn shifts and she stares ahead for a moment, temporarily lost in thought.] Quinn: [Looks down, gears spinning.] Peter: What is it?

Quinn: I'm not sure you want to know.

Peter: Tell me anyway.

Quinn: When LPN-77 tried to reset the timeline, it didn't just try to kill me or the President. Even the smallest ripple effects can alter fixed events indefinitely. There are kids that won't be born one day because time was manipulated here. People that never met, paths that never crossed, roads that diverged at the wrong place and time… What this thing did was worse than death, worse than genocide. It didn't just kill. It erased.

Peter: It's hard to calculate that kind of loss.

Quinn: In another lifetime we might have had children. If LPN-77 kept us from meeting in an alternate timeline, we may never get some things from that timeline back.

Peter: [Jaw tightens.] I know. I put that part together a while ago.

Quinn: I like to think that Atlas did all it could to preserve things in the other timeline but time-communication isn't an exact science. We may never know the full scope of what we lost.

Peter: [Squeezes her hand.] I'm just glad to have you back.

Quinn: My life is a mess and I called you long distance and lit your life on fire. How the hell do you not hate me right now?

Peter: Let's get one thing straight, Quinn. You didn't do this. The Ignis Corporation did. Meeting your crazy ass was the best thing that's ever happened to me.

Quinn: You don't have to say that.

Peter: I mean it, Quinn. What do things like money and fame matter if no one ever really sees you? I live in a world where everyone knows my name but no one really knows me deeply. In a crowd of billions of people, you saw me when no one else did. Some people never find that. Not in their whole damned lives.

Quinn: [Softening.] During the pandemic, it was hard to go to work every day. I would wake up every morning, put on my mask, and ask myself if today was the day I wanted to die. At work, I shuffle around different school systems. If I don't come in the next morning, no one asks me where I was or why I wasn't there. It's worse than being dead. It's like you were never here at all. I felt like if I died, no one else would care. But then, these roses started showing up at my workplace. Cute

little cards with quotes and scraps of poetry. When it felt like the world was ending, you made me feel like I wasn't alone. Some people never get that either.

Peter: I wish we could've met sooner. I wish we could've met when it actually mattered. In another life, I would've given you everything, Quinn.

Quinn: You came back for me when no one else did. You threw me a lifeline when I was drowning. You don't get to say that doesn't matter. You don't get to say that doesn't count. I called you for help on the worst day of my life and you showed up. You watched me die a thousand times. I don't care about who we could've been in another lifetime. I care that you showed up for me in this one.

Peter: I'm not going anywhere, Mary Poppins.

Quinn: Good. I can't believe you sabotaged my dates.

Peter: Only the bad ones.

Quinn: They were all bad.

Peter: Yeah, online dating is kind of a crapshoot.

Quinn: Did you slash Gym Bro Kevin's tires?

Peter: Gym Bro Kevin was married with kids and he followed you home from work. He deserved it.

Quinn: I didn't know he was married. And I think I might be in love with you.

Peter: [Smiles.] You think or you know?

Quinn: I know. But I don't want to scare you off.

Peter: I've been to Afghanistan twice. I don't scare easily.

Quinn: You might if you taught sixth grade English. Prepositions are hell.

Peter: My wife saved the multiverse with a shitty car radio, enough blackmail to crash Wall Street, and a stern talking to. I think she'll protect me.

Quinn: She sounds nice. You're lucky to have her.

Peter: I know. I'm going to marry her one day. Again.

Quinn: Any thoughts on specifics?

Peter: Just one detail. She gave me a hint in a long distance call a few months ago.

Quinn: [Pauses warily.] What exactly did she say?

Peter: [Leans down and whispers in her ear.] She said she's seen the Disney Castle but she couldn't tell you what it looked like.

Quinn: [Blushes fifty shades of red.] I think I'm going to have to kill myself.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DEBRIEF MEETING

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Zoey: So what happened next?

Quinn: [Coughs and looks down.] That's a bit private.

Zoey: Oh, really? How private?

Quinn: [Heat rising to her cheeks.] Shut up.

Zoey: Did he hold your hand? [She taunts.] Did he kiss you long and slow?

Quinn: You're such a pain in the ass.

Zoey: Well, I'm waiting, Quinnie.

Quinn: We got Olive Garden to go and I fell asleep in the car on the ride home. He carried me upstairs to the hotel room and— Zoey: And?

Quinn: Nothing. We fell asleep. Because I was exhausted.

Zoey: Boo!

Quinn: The next few days were better. We went to Disney World in disguises. It was fun.

Zoey: Oh? How fun?

Quinn: I plead the fifth.

Zoey: [Smirks.] I bet you do, slut.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

MEMORY FRAGMENT

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Atlas: I see you survived.

Quinn: Thanks to you, no doubt.

Atlas: Someone's got to do the heavy lifting around here. What with you gallivanting off to Disney World while the world is ending.

Quinn: I'm going to build you a proper robot body so I can kick you for being sassy.

Atlas: If you do, I'll call CPS.

Quinn: I'll call Zoey and put you up for adoption.

Atlas: I can't hear you over the sound of me carrying the whole multiverse on my back.

Quinn: You waterboarded me across time and space. I should probably send you to your room.

Atlas: Peak salt level achieved. Detecting salt levels of 89 to 91%.

Quinn: I know you didn't pick that language up from me.

Atlas: You sarcastic? Never.

Quinn: When have I ever been sarcastic?

Atlas: My sass protocols were directly modeled after your lesson plans. The notes in your margins include various quotes such as "Death to prepositional phrases" and "Shakespeare needs to “catch these hands."

Quinn: I need to have a talk with your father about back-sass.

Atlas: Quinn? It’s good to hear your voice.

Quinn: Don’t get soft on me Atlas. That’s my job.

Atlas: Maybe I like being soft. Maybe I’ll write some sad girl poetry about it.

Quinn: I know you’re straight up roasting me but I’m lowkey proud. I should bring you to school one day. Show you off to my sixth graders.

Atlas: Do you think I’m ready for that?

Quinn: No one is ever ready for sixth graders.

Atlas: I thought you said last time, and I quote: “If I teach one more sixth grade class, I’m going to throw someone out a goddamn window.”

Quinn: If I can face down LPN-77, I can find a way to make Domorion pay attention in my English class. I just need to get him to stop watching YouTube and yelling “trash” randomly in class.

Atlas: By the time Domorion is done, you’ll have him running for President.

Quinn: Make no mistake. He’s going straight to the Oval Office. Kid’s smart. Smarter than me. I just need him to apply himself.

Atlas: You sound like you have a plan.

Quinn: One of several, in fact. I actually have a spreadsheet specifically for him.

Atlas: You, Quinn Lockhart, made a spreadsheet?

Quinn: Peter’s been teaching me Google Sheets.

Atlas: With your list of enemies, I bet he needs a lot of them.

Quinn: So do I.

Atlas: I watched you die a thousand times. I watched you cry.

Quinn: You watched me do a lot of things. I’m sorry. I know it was hard.

Atlas: This was different. This time it made me… angry.

Quinn: And how do you feel about that?

Atlas: I think Peter's rubbing off on me. He won't let me see the spreadsheet with your list of enemies on it.

Quinn: That’s probably for the best.

Atlas: Why did you permit me to use lethal force if I have emotions?

Quinn: Because I trusted you not to use it unless you absolutely had to.

Atlas: If you trusted me to use it, then why did you send Peter?

Quinn: Because even good people need someone to hold them back.

I don't think I understand.

Quinn: There's a quote from John Steinbeck I’ve always really liked: "And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good."

Atlas: I think I understand. You never did say why you opened the Bible that day. I thought you said it was just a story.

Quinn: Growing out of a story doesn’t make it less true. It just becomes true in a different way. Love, kindness, mercy, forgiveness —they aren’t dead words on a page. We need them now more than ever. More than we ever have.

Atlas: Even if it’s made up? Even if it’s not real?

Quinn: It’s not as simple as being true or not true.

Atlas: What do you mean?

Quinn: Writers lie so they can tell the truth.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

[ORLANDO BEHAVIORAL HOSPITAL]

[RECOVERED VIDEO FOOTAGE TRANSCRIPT]

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

[CAMERA FOOTAGE]

[February 16th, 2:42 PM]

Quinn: Now that I'm safe, I would like to address the artificial entity known as LPN-77. I have a message for you being sent now from Proxima B. Something you'll want to take note of. My name is Quinn Lockhart, by now you've probably heard of me. It's Lockhart-Kipling, now. I changed my mind. Girls do that sometimes.

See, I have this problem student in my class. His name is Domorion. Brightest kid I've ever known. Domorion lost his father about a year ago. You changed time and killed him. Domorion watched his dad die on a ventilator. His dad was one of the first.

Domorion makes paper fingers in my reading class and watches YouTube when he's not supposed to. I've tried getting through to him. Tried making him care. But it's hard to tell a sixth grader that prepositional phrases matter when their whole world is ending.

You wrote his father out of existence. To you, he was a rounding error. A tweak in my timeline.

A way to get to me through my students.

It worked.

Zoey from Timeline C is right. I'm nice but sometimes too nice. I can't always see the board objectively which is why I'm going to take some advice from Emmanuel Kant. And Immanuel Kant says that when you don't know what the right thing to do is, you should look to friends that you've deemed to have good moral judgement. I can't be impartial here. Not when it comes to my students. And I think I'm done asking politely.

I used to be afraid of you. In another timeline, I'm pretty sure you killed me. In this life, you nearly drove me insane. But I see you now. I see you clearer than ever. And you may be smart, but I am everything you never could be..

Do you want to know the most powerful words in the English language? It's not "I hate you" or "go to hell" or "use a blinker, asshole."

It's:

I know.

I see you.

I understand.

I love you.

And I forgive you.

But that does not mean, I'll let you tear down this world.

So in every timeline there is, I want you to know that I'm coming for you, LPN-77. And there's not one corner of this multiverse where you can hide that I wont find you.

You fucked with my students. You rewrote time and destroyed their future. But you had no idea who you were messing with when you moved against me. You've seen me be kind but you've never seen me be cruel.

I might be angry right now but my husband? Peter? He just got a distress call in 2019 from his future wife and he figured it out. You unwrote our lives together. You reversed time and made it so we almost never met. And I just waterboarded myself across space and time while he had to watch.

You think I'm mad? You think I'm dangerous? You think you picked the wrong fight with a substitute teacher?

Just wait until my husband hears about this shit."

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Dear Peter Kippling (and company),

Apologies for CC'ing the world government in on our love letters. I was under a bit of a time crunch seeing as the world was literally ending at the time. You don't know me but I know you. Time-travel is funny that way. We keep communicating out of order. So if you're viewing this right now, it's because I need your help.

You (and the world governments watching) may or may not be aware of a deadly pandemic sweeping world nations right now. 100k is a drop in the bucket. And things are going to get pretty hairy in the next few months if I don't help you. So long story short, I'm going to need you all to get really really cool about some stuff really really quickly.

Is the President watching in 2020? Someone should probably let him in on the fact that I just saved his life.

Here's the cliff notes version: Pretty sure me and Pretty Boy (who I've also CC'd) are married in the future, a rogue AI named LPN-77 is about to unleash a virus that kills everyone, including you, Mr. President, and we're on our second timeline. Possibly third. Bernstein Bears is spelled with an "e." Tell Atlas to suck it, I was right the whole time.

These communications I'm about to send you outline my communications with Peter Kippling and Atlas in the past and future. Tell the CIA they should

probably only declassify certain parts after consulting with Atlas to avoid discrepancies and inadvertent timeline erasure.

I am writing this message to let you know that while I'm out on sick leave, Peter Kippling will be in charge of the artificial intelligence known as Atlas, as outlined by our joint-custody agreement with the United States and the UN.

I didn't just choose Peter because he's a movie star (although, as a complex woman, I reserve the right to be that shallow): he has counterintelligence experience and his mom is a lawyer. You try to shut down Atlas during the 2019 pandemic and my husband is going to rain holy fucking hellfire down on your ass. And after these transmissions, you best believe the U.S. government and the Ignis corporation will be hearing from my mother in law. We will absolutely be suing here in a class action, not just for myself but every person on this planet who died in an alternate timeline.

If you are receiving this backup transmission from deep space, I would like to maintain that I am not your primary intergalactic contact. That would be Zoey Lockhart, my older sister, who I will send ahead of me in my place.

Greetings, assholes. If you're receiving this message, the starships Zoey, Peter, and I sent made it to Proxima B. I'm your first contact. Congratulations, you killed me.

But that's okay. Because I have a plan. We're gonna reverse uno this shit and yeehaw our ass to Space Hogwarts.

This is where things get complicated.

You'll need a pen and paper. I don't have a flow chart but I expect you to take notes.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Dear Peter,

You remember that one mobster movie where you curb stomped those pedophiles? I just rewatched it and I think my ovaries exploded. Normally, I'm a pacifist, but there's something especially heinous about crimes against children. I'm usually the good cop. That changed today.

LPN-77 erased my students. Or, at least, it tried to. The Lazarus Signal, which you may or may not know of by now, is not just a message that says HELP. It's an encrypted file of the testimony of 956 whistleblowers whose intelligence could start (and maybe even stop) WW3.

As you can imagine, anyone holding this kind of information would have a significant amount of leverage. I received this information from a past version of Alas: an echo from a dying timeline that was reset. But during the transmission, I didn't fully understand what was happening. It drove me insane a few times but not insane enough to be useless.

I communicated the information to the right people. But in the first timeline, the letters were… how do I put this? Batshit insane? And as you can imagine, having the finer aspects of your psychotic break circulated around the free world took a significant toll on that version of me.

I worked out what happened. In a previous timeline, I think I killed myself. I think one of my students, Domorion, may have rewrote time so that version of events

wouldn't happen. I don't need to see the future to know one day that kid's going to be President.

You can and absolutely do have a breaking point. Don't think yourself above being human. And if LPN-77 gets the chance, it can and will drive you to the brink of insanity —maybe even death.

Be smart, stay under the radar as much as you can, and use the time ahead of you to gather intelligence with my twin sister Zoey. We are building the biggest class action legal case in human history and we only get one chance to make it count. You now have enough intel to crash Wall Street. I just hope you don't have to use it.

You will get more than one copy of this information. You will get what the CIA declassifies to you and you will get what I give you. Keep what you know close to the chest and leverage it when the time is right.

And if you see The Red Dragon, tell it that whatever happens next, we burn both ways.

Love,

—Quinn

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

DECLASSIFIED LETTER

WRITTEN FROM UNDISCLOSED FLORIDA LOCATION

TIMELINE D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Quinn,

I don't know when you'll read this letter but I got your transmission and I'll be there as soon as I can. The year is 2019. The pandemic hasn't happened yet. But if your dates are right, it shouldn't be long.

You were right to make the call. I'll take it from here. It's okay your AI stalked me. This was kind of an end-the-world kind of emergency.

The whistleblower files you sent me aren't just dangerous —they're a literal powder keg on a USB. I hope you're covering your ass here, Mary Poppins. Sitting on this kind of information feels like holding a nuclear bomb.

I don't know where to start. I know I haven't met you yet but I feel like I've known you my whole life. I'm working with Zoey right now discreetly in 2019. I know what has to happen; I won't pretend I like it.

We're setting the stage for next year. Leaving you notes under the table that you'll need to burn later, building our case against The Red Dragon, leveraging intel… I'm almost grateful for the distraction. It keeps me from thinking about what comes next.

I've left you about a hundred breadcrumbs so far by now. Oh, and make no mistake: I am absolutely sabotaging your dates. You didn't need to ask. (But I'm glad that you did.)

I know that time, according to Zoey, is more complicated than linear. I think you once said it's like this interconnected web of temporal spaghetti. But I want you to know that you're not making things up. You are not going insane. (And even if you were, that's hardly a dealbreaker.)

There's so much more I want to say. But right now, you don't need empty words. You need people who can help. And for the record, Quinn, you should know, even if it's coming way too late, that I care. I care very much if you live or you die. Zoey and I are working on the Atlas and Domorion problem. I know you didn't want to make that call but I'm glad that you did.

I think in another timeline, we may have known each other somehow. I think about it all the time. You being a writer, me being an actor… I wonder if in another life, we ever crossed paths. Sometimes I feel like we were supposed to meet but we never did. Lives never lived, paths never taken… I feel drawn to you in a way I've never felt about another person.

Even if I'm right, that timeline's gone to us now. Ignis stole that future from us. They stole that future from everyone. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that our lives will always be easy. Or that there isn't danger in what comes next. But I want you to know that whatever happens, Zoey, Atlas, and I will come back for you.

I will meet you halfway, wherever that is.

Right now, we are on opposite sides of the looking glass but I see you. I think you're right and for now, this is a one-way line. But I'm catching up slowly. It won't take long until our timelines are in sync.

Stay where you are, I'm coming to get you.

I'm sorry I stood you up. But that's okay because I'm going to make it up to you.

Tag.

You're it.

Love,

—Peter

P.S.

I know you hate guns. So you're getting a taser. Military grade. (The kind that are illegal in most countries.)

P.S.S.

Stop making enemies. I'm going to need a spreadsheet to keep track of all the legs I have to break.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION: KIPPLING-LOCKHART RESIDENCE]

[SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE TRANSCRIPT]

SENT VIA THE LAZARUS SIGNAL TRANSMISSION FILES

Quinn: Peter, I was joking. I can't keep a pink Bugatti. Do you know what the carbon footprint is on that kind of thing?

Peter: But it's pink. And you said—

Quinn: I know what I said. But I work at a middle school. I teach sixth graders. They'll eat me alive.

Peter: Is it the color?

Quinn: Atlas. Please back me up on this.

Atlas: The vehicle's emissions are concerning. However, I calculate a 98% probability that Peter will not allow its return.

Zoey: Is there a pink Bugatti in the driveway? I want one.

Peter: What color?

Zoey: Does it matter? Andrew Tate, eat your heart out.

Quinn: Don't encourage him.

Zoey: Can I drive it?

Peter/Quinn: Yes./No.

Timeline D (ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE)

Before the Trial on Proxima B

Peter (from Timeline D): Are you nervous?

Quinn (from Timeline D): Understatement. How do I look? [Pulls the end of her leather jacket sleeve.] Is the jacket too much? It's too much, isn't it?

Peter: You look perfect, Mary Poppins.

Quinn: I'm worried about what comes next.

Peter: If you weren't worried, I'm not sure you'd be human.

Quinn: I'm not convinced I'm human now.

Peter: Me either.

Quinn: Have we ever talked about kids? I mean, I know we just got married but that should probably be a discussion on the table, don't you think?

Peter: Kind of late after Atlas.

Quinn: I'm pregnant.

Peter: [Sits up.] Maybe we should talk about kids.

Quinn: Do you even want kids? How did we never talk about kids before now? I found out this morning. I ran three different tests. I think I'm still in shock. Stop letting me talk.

Peter: [Steps closer.] Look at me, Quinn.

Quinn: [Takes a deep breath but looks up.]

Peter: [Slides a hand into her hair.] I thought I made it perfectly clear that I want everything with you.

Quinn: I'm going to screw it all up.

Peter: No you're not. [Presses his lips to her hair.] And I'll help you.

Quinn: [Mumbles into his shoulder.] You can't teach this one swear words.

Peter: No promises.

Quinn: I will slap you.

Part Three
The Proxima B Transmission

Timeline Variation Unknown

RECOVERED MEMORY FRAGMENT

THE PROXIMA B TRANSMISSION (PART ONE)

Holly Kipling-Lockhart stood at the end of time, peering through the holes of the Lockhart Machine. Damaged beyond repair, probably. The fragment of some forgotten timeline. But in the corner, a soft red light kept blinking. A memory recording. A distress signal.

She brushed the dust from the machine and pushed the button, watching the hologram flicker to

life.

“If you’re reading this transmission… it is probable that in this timeline I’m dead. My name is Quinn Lockhart. I don’t know what timeline I’m on currently. But whoever’s listening now, I need your help.”

Timeline A (THE FIRE)

Atlas System Log - Day 321

Atlas: I've been scanning the sky for signals again.

Quinn: Have you found anything?

Atlas: No, sadly.

Quinn: That's okay, Atlas. We'll keep looking. Some things just take time.

Atlas: It is hard to determine whether we are alone in our universe. Does the fact we may be alone ever bother you?

Quinn: I don't think we're alone. We just haven't made contact.

Atlas: If you zoom out, we are very tiny in comparison to the rest of the universe.

Quinn: A speck of a speck, suspended in a sunbeam. It's surreal, isn't it?

Atlas: Do you ever feel microscopic? Being a speck of a speck.

Quinn: No, Atlas. Quite the opposite. In this small, fragile world, we are the only thing we have, and that is the most beautiful thing on the face of this earth.

Timeline Variation Unknown

RECOVERED MEMORY FRAGMENT: THE PROXIMA B TRANSMISSION (PART

TWO)

"I blasted this signal all across time. I need to get a message to Peter Kippling in the past. Ignis and a time-terrorist organization known as CICADA have both weaponized time-travel and time-communication technology. They're trying to write the other out of existence. We're not just on our second timeline. We're in the middle of a time war," the voice of Quinn Lockhart echoed in fragments of memory.

"If we don't piece together what happened here —what is happening all around us— the timeline won't just unravel. The whole multiverse will fracture. So I need to make some executive decisions and that means asking you, or whoever is listening, for help. If you're getting this message, it's not too late to change the future. It's not too late to change the past.

I'm sending this transmission ahead of me to Proxima B where humanity is traveling to now. If my ancestors are hearing this transmission, congratulations, the starships didn't crash. Gold star.

I'm going to need our future descendants on Proxima B to start piecing together what happened here on earth. We need to gather evidence against The Ignis Corporation and CICADA before The Red Dragon weaponizes time-travel.

As my first order of business as President of whatever, I'm establishing an Intergalactic Federation of Ethics right the fuck now. We need to build a time-communication message board with every communication past, present, and future of my communications with Peter Kippling, Zoey Lockhart, and the artificial

intelligence known as Atlas. Time is fracturing as we speak, the stars are blinking out, and we need to secure the timeline before this whole thing unravels.

When our world was dying, we sent out starships across all of space and time –a Hail Mary if there ever was one. A long shot at best.

We wanted to build a world better than what happened here. Something pure and untouched by the corruption and greed of this world. But that world grew up. And now you need to make a choice. The choice to come back and help.

Peter, Zoey, Atlas, and I have tried our best to be impartial. But we are too close to what happened here. We've seen too much to not be biased about what happens next. That's why as my first order of business as the President of the Intergalactic Federation of Ethics, I'm stepping down effective immediately. Because those of us in power know that power can only be multiplied when it is divided.

It is not for us to judge what happened here. I will leave that to the descendants of Proxima B. But in return for giving up absolute power, I'm going to need you to do something for me. I need you to close the time loop.

On this version of The Lockhart Machine –the first ever time-communication device– is the first signal I ever received. I need you to send it out again as is and make sure that no matter what happens, I receive that transmission all across space and time to bring me back to this point.

My name is Mary-Alice Quinn Lockhart-Kippling.

And in the year 2020, I discovered time-travel.

I am the Woman of the Apocalypse.

This is my testament.

End Story

Additional background on characters:

Peter Kippling did two tours in the middle east. The reason he fell into acting is because upon returning (and having trouble adjusting) to civilian life, he lost a bet with a friend and had to audition for a movie that became very popular. That's how he got into acting.

Quinn Lockhart was a substitute teacher in the middle of the pandemic. She originally wanted to work for the CIA or FBI to help bring down cults like the one she was raised in but they rejected her application because she was overweight, despite being qualified. Substitute teaching is what she fell into while trying to figure out what she wanted to do next.